

Ideology and curriculum

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Chapter 3

Economics and control in everyday school life

(with Nancy King)

As we saw in the last chapter, schools seem to contribute to inequality in that they are tacitly organized to differentially distribute specific kinds of knowledge. This is in large part related both to the role of the school in maximizing the production of technical cultural 'commodities' and to the sorting or selecting function of schools in allocating people to the positions 'required' by the economic sector of society. As we are beginning to understand more fully, though, schools also play a rather large part in distributing the kinds of normative and dispositional elements required to make this inequality seem natural. They teach a hidden curriculum that seems uniquely suited to maintain the ideological hegemony of the most powerful classes in this society. As the reproduction theorists argued in Chapter 2, ideological and social stability rests in part on the internalization, at the very bottom of our brains, of the principles and commonsense rules which govern the existing social order. This ideological saturation will undoubtedly be more effective if it is done early in one's life. In schools this means the earlier the better, in essence from day one in kindergarten. The principles and rules that are taught will give meaning to students' situations (schools are, in fact, organized in such a way as to maintain these definitions) and at the same time will also serve economic interests. Both elements of an effective ideology will be present.

Let us begin to look at this more carefully by first laying to rest some of the arguments made by the more romantic critics of schooling that these ideological configurations are taught in schools because teachers do not care enough. Then we can see what economically rooted norms and dispositions are actually taught in institutions of cultural preservation and distribution like schools.

Schooling and cultural capital

One of the least attractive arguments in recent years has been that schools are relatively unexciting, boring, or what have you, because of mindlessness.¹ The argument has it that schools covertly teach all those things that humanistic critics of schools so like to write and talk about — behavioral consensus, institutional rather than personal goals and norms, alienation from one's products, etc. — and that they do so because teachers, administrators, and other educators do not really know what they are doing.

However, such a perspective is misleading at best. In the first place, it is thoroughly ahistorical. It ignores the fact that schools were in part designed to teach exactly these things. The hidden curriculum, the tacit teaching of social and economic norms and expectations to students in schools, is not as hidden or 'mindless' as many educators believe. Second, it ignores the critical task schools perform as the fundamental set of institutions in advanced industrial societies that certifies adult competence. It pulls schools out of their setting within a larger and much more powerful nexus of economic and political institutions that give schools their meaning. That is, just as in their role in the maximization of the production of technical knowledge, schools seem, by and large, to do what they are supposed to do, at least in terms of roughly providing dispositions and propensities 'functional' in later life in a complex and stratified social and economic order.

While there is no doubt that mindlessness does exist other than in Charles Silberman's mind, it is not an adequate descriptive device — any more than venality or indifference — in explaining why schools are so resistant to change or why schools teach what they do.² Nor is it an appropriate conceptual tool to ferret out what, precisely, is taught in schools or why some social meanings and not others are used in the organization of school life.

Yet, it is not just school critics who present too simple an analysis of the social and economic meaning of schools. All too often, the social meaning of school experience has been accepted as unproblematic by sociologists of education, or as problems merely of engineering by curriculum specialists and other programmatically inclined educators. The curriculum field, more particularly than other educational areas, has been dominated by a perspective that might best be called 'technological,' in that the major interest guiding its work has involved finding the one best set of means to reach pre-chosen educational ends.³ As I pointed out, against this relatively ameliorative and uncritical background, a number of sociologists and curriculum scholars, influenced strongly by the sociology of knowledge in both its Marxist (or neo-Marxist) and phenomenological variants, have begun to raise

serious questions about the lack of attention to the relationship between school knowledge and extra-school phenomena. We saw that a fundamental starting point in these investigations has been well articulated by Michael Young when he notes that there is a 'dialectical relationship between access to power and the opportunity to legitimize certain dominant categories, and the process by which the availability of such categories to some groups enables them to assert power and control over others.'⁴ In essence, just as there is a relatively unequal distribution of economic capital in society, so too is there a similar distribution of cultural capital.⁵ In advanced industrial societies, schools are particularly important as distributors of this cultural capital, and they play a critical role in giving legitimacy to categories and forms of knowledge. The very fact that certain traditions and normative 'content' are construed as school knowledge is prima facie evidence of their perceived legitimacy.

I want to argue here that the *problem* of educational knowledge, of what is taught in schools, has to be considered as a form of the larger distribution of goods and services in a society. It is not merely an analytic problem (what shall be construed as knowledge?), nor simply a technical one (how do we organize and store knowledge so that children may have access to it and 'master' it?), nor, finally, is it a purely psychological problem (how do we get students to learn x?). Rather, the study of educational knowledge is a study in ideology, the investigation of what is considered *legitimate* knowledge (be it knowledge of the logical type of 'that,' 'how,' or 'to') by specific social groups and classes, in specific institutions, at specific historical moments. It is, further, a critically-oriented form of investigation, in that it chooses to focus on how this knowledge, as distributed in schools, may contribute to a cognitive and dispositional development that strengthens or reinforces existing (and often problematic) institutional arrangements in society. In clearer terms, the overt and 'covert knowledge' found within school settings, and the principles of selection, organization, and evaluation of this knowledge, are value-governed selections from a much larger universe of possible knowledge and selection principles. Hence they must not be accepted as given, but must be made problematic — bracketed, if you will — so that the social and economic ideologies and the institutionally patterned meanings which stand behind them, can be scrutinized. The latent meaning and the connotation that lies behind the commonsense acceptability of a position may be its most important attributes. And these hidden institutional meanings and relations are almost never uncovered if we are guided only by amelioration.⁶ As Kallos has noted, any educational system has both manifest and latent 'functions.' These need to be characterized not only in educational (or learning) terms but, more importantly, in

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politico-economic terms. In short, discussions about the quality of educational life are relatively meaningless if the 'specific functions of the educational system are unrecognized.'⁷

If much of the literature on what schools tacitly teach is accurate, then the specific functions may be more economic than intellectual. In this chapter, I would like to focus on certain aspects of the problem of schooling and social and economic meaning. I shall look at schools as institutions that embody collective traditions and human intentions which, in turn, are the products of identifiable social and economic ideologies. Thus, our starting point might best be phrased as the question, "Whose meanings are collected and distributed through the overt and hidden curricula in schools?" That is, as Marx was fond of saying, reality does not stalk around with a label. The curriculum in schools responds to and represents ideological and cultural resources that come from somewhere. Not all groups' visions are represented and not all groups' meanings are responded to. How, then, do schools act to distribute this cultural capital? Whose reality 'stalks' in the corridors and classrooms of American schools?

I shall focus on two areas. First, I shall offer a description (one that will be considerably deepened in Chapter 4) of the historical process through which certain social meanings became particularly school meanings and thus have the weight of decades of acceptance behind them. Second, I shall offer empirical evidence, from a study of kindergarten experience, to document the potency and staying power of these particular social meanings. Finally, I shall raise the question of whether piecemeal reforms, to deal with eliminating these ideological meanings, be they oriented humanistically or in other directions, can succeed alone.

The task of dealing with sets of meanings in schools has traditionally fallen upon the curriculum specialist. Historically, however, this concern for meanings in schools by curriculumists has been linked to varied notions of social control. This should not surprise us. It should be obvious, though it is usually not so, that questions about meanings in social institutions tend to become questions of control.⁸ That is, the forms of knowledge (both overt and covert kinds) one finds within school settings imply notions of power and of economic resources and control. The very choice of school knowledge, the act of designing school environments, though they may not be done consciously, are often based on ideological and economic presuppositions which provide commonsense rules for educators' thought and action. Perhaps the links between meaning and control in schools will become clearer if we reflect on a relatively abbreviated account of the history of curriculum.

Meaning and control in curriculum history

The British sociologist Bill Williamson argues that men and women have to contend with the institutional and ideological forms of earlier times as the basic constraints on what they can achieve.⁹ If this notion is to be taken seriously, then one must understand what is provided and taught in schools in historical terms. As Williamson notes, 'Earlier educational attitudes of dominant groups in society still carry historical weight and are exemplified even in the bricks and mortar of the school buildings themselves.'¹⁰

If we are to be honest with ourselves, we must acknowledge that the curriculum field has its roots in the soil of social control. Its intellectual paradigm first took shape in the early part of this century, and became an identifiable set of procedures for the selection and organization of school knowledge — procedures to be taught to teachers and other educators. At that time, the fundamental concern of the people in the curriculum field was that of social control. Part of this concern is understandable. Many of the important figures who influenced the curriculum field (such as Charles C. Peters, Ross Finney, and especially David Snedden) had interests that spanned both the field of educational sociology and the more general problems of what should actually happen in schools. The idea of social control was of growing importance in the American Sociological Society at that time, and was an idea which seemed to capture both the imagination and energy of many of the nation's intelligentsia, as well as of powerful segments of the business community. It is, therefore, not difficult to see how it also captured those figures who wore two hats, who were both sociologists and curriculum workers.¹¹

But an interest in schooling as a mechanism for social control was not merely borrowed from sociology. The individuals who first called themselves curriculumists (men like Franklin Bobbitt and W. W. Charters) were vitally concerned with social control for ideological reasons as well. These men were strongly influenced by the scientific management movement and by the work of social measurement specialists,¹² they were also guided by beliefs that found the popular eugenics movement a 'progressive' social force. Thus, they brought social control into the very heart of the field whose task it was to develop criteria for selecting those meanings with which students would come into contact in our schools.

This is not, of course, to say that social control in and of itself is always undesirable. Social life without some element of control is nearly impossible to envisage, if only because of the fact that institutions, qua institutions, tend to respond to the regularities of human interaction. Rather, there was historically a specific set of assumptions

and to day it is recognized as a common sense

— of commonsense rules — about school meanings and control that strongly influenced early curriculum workers. They not only assumed that organized society must maintain itself through the preservation of some of its valued forms of interaction and meaning (a quite general and wholly understandable 'weak' sense of social control). They also had, deeply embedded in their ideological perspective, a 'strong' sense of control. Here, education in general, and the everyday meanings of the curriculum in schools in particular, were seen as essential elements in the preservation of existing social privilege, interests, and knowledge, which were the prerogatives of one element of the population, maintained at the expense of less powerful groups.¹³ As we shall see in considerably more detail in Chapter 4, more often, this took the form of attempting to guarantee expert and scientific control in society, to eliminate or 'socialize' unwanted racial or ethnic groups or their characteristics, or to produce an economically efficient group of citizens, in order to, as C. C. Peters put it, reduce the maladjustment of workers to their jobs. This latter interest, the economic substratum of everyday school life, becomes of particular importance when, later in this chapter, we look at what schools teach about work and play.

Of course, social control as an idea or interest did not originate with the early curriculum movement's attempts to use school knowledge for rather conservative social ends. Social control was an implied aim of a large number of ameliorative social and political programs carried out during the nineteenth century by both state and private agencies. It had been their intention, too, that order, stability, and the imperative of industrial growth might be maintained in the face of a variety of social and economic changes.¹⁴ As Feinberg's analysis of the ideological roots of liberal educational policy demonstrates, even in this century many of the proposed 'reforms,' both in schools and elsewhere, have lately served the conservative social interests of stability and social stratification.¹⁵

The argument presented so far is not meant to debunk the efforts of educators and social reformers. Instead, it is an attempt to place the current debate concerning the lack of humaneness in schools, the tacit teaching of social norms, values, and so forth, within a larger historical context. Without such a context, we cannot fully understand the relationship between what schools actually do and an advanced industrial economy like our own. The best example of this context can be found in the changing ideological functions of schooling in general and curricular meanings in particular. Behind much of the debate about the role of formal education in the USA during the nineteenth century lay a variety of concerns about the standardization of educational environments, about the teaching, through day-to-day school interaction, of moral, normative, and dispositional values, and about economic

functionalism. Today these concerns have been given the name of the 'hidden curriculum' by Philip Jackson¹⁶ and others. But it is the very question of its hiddenness that may help us uncover the historical relationship between what is taught in schools and the larger context of the institutions that surround them.

We should be aware that, historically, the hidden curriculum was not hidden at all, but was instead the overt function of schools during much of their careers as institutions. During the nineteenth century, the increasing diversity of political, social, and cultural attributes and structures pushed educators to resume with renewed vigor the language of social control and homogenization that had dominated educational rhetoric from the earliest colonial period.¹⁷ As the century progressed, the rhetoric of reform — of justifying one's ideological position against other interest groups — did not merely focus on the critical need for social homogeneity. Using schools as a primary agency for inculcating values and for creating an 'American community' was not enough. The growing pressures of modernization and industrialization also created certain expectations of efficiency and functionalism among some classes and in an industrial elite in society as well. As Vallance puts it, 'to assertive socialization was added a focus on organizational efficiency.' Thus, the reforms having the greatest effect on school organization, and ultimately on the procedures and principles which governed life in classrooms, were dominated by the language of and an interest in production, well-adjusted economic functioning, and bureaucratic skills. In this process, the underlying reasons for reform slowly changed from an active concern for consensus of values to an economic functionalism.¹⁸ But this could occur only if the prior period, with its search for a standardized national character, built in large part through the characteristics of schools, had both been accepted and perceived as successful. Thus, the institutional outlines of schools with their relatively standardized day-to-day forms of interaction provided the mechanisms by which a normative consensus could be 'taught.' And within these broad outlines, these behavioral regularities of the institution, if you will, an ideological set of commonsense rules for curriculum selection and for organizing school experience based on efficiency, economic functionalism, and bureaucratic exigencies took hold. The former became the deep structure, the first hidden curriculum, which encased the latter. Once the hidden curriculum had become hidden, when a uniform and standardized learning context had become established, and when social selection and control were taken as given in schooling, only then could attention be paid to the needs of the individual or other more 'ethereal' concerns.¹⁹

Thus, historically, a core of commonsense meanings, combining normative consensus and economic adjustment, was built into the very

structure of formal education. This is not to say that there have been no significant educational movements toward, say, education for self-development. But rather, behind these preferential choices about individual needs there was a more powerful set of expectations surrounding schooling which provided the constitutive structure of school experience. As a number of economists have recently noted, the most economically important 'latent function' of school life seems to be the selection and generation of personality attributes and normative meanings that enable one to have a supposed chance at economic rewards.²⁰ As we saw, this is closely linked, as well, to the school's cultural role in maximizing the production of technical knowledge. Since the school is the only major institution that stands between the family and the labor market, it is not odd that, both historically and currently, certain social meanings which have differential benefits are distributed in schools.

But what are these particular social meanings? How are they organized and displayed in everyday school life? It is these questions to which we now turn.

Ideology and curriculum in use

The larger concerns of the prior section with the relationship between ideology and school knowledge, between meanings and control, tend to be altogether too vague unless one can see them as forces in the activities of school people and students, as they go about their particular lives in classrooms. As investigators of the hidden curriculum and others have noted, the concrete modes by which knowledge is distributed in classrooms and the commonsense practices of teachers and students can illuminate the connections between school life and the structures of ideology, power, and economic resources of which schools are a part.²¹

Just as there is a social distribution of cultural capital in society, so too is there a social distribution of knowledge within classrooms. For example, different 'kinds' of students get different 'kinds' of knowledge. Keddie documents this well in her study of the knowledge teachers have of their students and the curricular knowledge then made available to them.²² However, although the differential distribution of classroom knowledge does exist and although it is intimately linked to the process of social labeling that goes on in schools,²³ (something I will document more clearly in Chapter 7), it is less important to my analysis than what might be called the 'deep structure' of school experience. What underlying meanings are negotiated and transmitted in schools behind the actual formal 'stuff' of curriculum content? What

happens when knowledge is filtered through teachers? Through what categories of normality and deviance is it filtered? What is the basic and organizing framework of the normative and conceptual knowledge that students actually get? In short, what is the *curriculum in use*? It is only by seeing this deep structure that we can begin pointing out how social norms, institutions, and ideological rules are continually sustained and mediated by the day-to-day interaction of commonsense actors, as they go about their normal practices.²⁴ This is especially true in classrooms. Social definitions about school knowledge — definitions that are both dialectically related to and rest within the larger context of the surrounding social and economic institutions — are maintained and recreated by the commonsense practices of teaching and evaluation in classrooms.²⁵

I shall focus on kindergarten here because it occupies a critical moment in the process by which students become competent in the rules, norms, values, and dispositions 'necessary' to function within institutional life as it now exists. Learning the role of student is a complex activity, one that takes time and continual interaction with institutional expectations. By focusing on how this occurs and on the content of the dispositions that are, both overtly and covertly, part of kindergarten knowledge, we can begin to illuminate the background knowledge children use as organizing principles for much of the rest of their school career.

In short, the social definitions internalized during one's initial school life provide the constitutive rules for later life in classrooms. Thus, the elements needing examination are what is construed as work or play, 'school knowledge' or merely 'my knowledge,' normality or deviance. As we shall see, the use-of-praise, the rules of access to materials, and the control of time and emotions all make significant contributions to the teaching of social meanings in school. But, as we shall also see, it is the meanings attached to the category of work which most clearly illuminate the possible place of schools in the complex nexus of economic and social institutions which surrounds us all.

Kindergarten experience serves as a foundation for the years of schooling to follow. Children who have attended kindergarten tend to demonstrate a general superiority in achievement in the elementary grades compared with children who have not attended kindergarten. However, attempts to determine exactly which teaching techniques and learning experiences contribute most directly to the 'intellectual and emotional growth' of kindergarten children have produced inconclusive results. Kindergarten training appears to exert its most powerful and lasting influence on the attitudes and the behavior of the children by acclimating them to a classroom environment. Children are introduced to their roles as elementary school pupils in kindergarten classrooms; it

is understanding and mastery of this *role* which makes for the greater success of kindergarten-trained children in elementary school.

Socialization in kindergarten classrooms includes the learning of norms and definitions of social interactions. It is the ongoing development of a working definition of the situation by the participants. In order to function adequately in a social situation, those involved must reach a common understanding of the meanings, limitations, and potential the setting affords for their interaction. During the first few weeks of the school year, the children and the teacher forge a common definition of the situation out of repeated interaction in the classroom. When one common set of social meanings is accepted, classroom activities will proceed smoothly. Most often these common meanings remain relatively stable unless the flow of events in the setting ceases to be orderly.

We should understand that just as in our earlier discussion of the metaphor of cultural distribution, socialization is not a one-way process either.²⁶ To some extent, the children in a classroom socialize the teacher as well as becoming socialized themselves. However, the children and the teacher do not have equal influence in determining the working definition of the situation. On the first day of school in a kindergarten classroom, the teacher has a more highly organized set of commonsense rules than the children. Since he or she also holds most of the power to control the events and resources in the classroom, it is his or her set of meanings that is dominant. Of course, even teachers are not free to define the classroom situation in any way they choose. As we saw earlier in this chapter, the school is a well-established institution, and it may be that neither the teacher nor the children can perceive more than marginal ways to deviate to any significant extent from the commonsense rules and expectations that distinguish schools from other institutions.

The negotiation of meanings in a kindergarten classroom is a critical phase in the socialization of the children. The meanings of classroom objects and events are not intrinsic to them, but are formed through social interaction. These meanings, as with other aspects of the definition of the situation, may shift for a time. At some point, however, they become stable and are not likely to be renegotiated unless the orderly flow of events in the classroom is disrupted.

Meanings of objects and events become clear to children as they participate in the social setting. The use of materials, the nature of authority, the quality of personal relationships, the spontaneous remarks, as well as other aspects of daily classroom life, all contribute to the child's growing awareness of his or her role in the classroom and to his or her understanding of the social setting. Therefore, as was argued in Chapter 1, to understand the social reality of schooling, it is neces-

sary to study it in actual classroom settings. Each concept, role, and object is a social creation bound to the situation in which it is produced. The meanings of classroom interaction cannot be assumed; they must be discovered. The abstraction of these meanings, together with the generalizations and insights drawn from them, may be applicable to other contexts, but the researcher's initial descriptions, understandings, and interpretations require that the social phenomena be encountered where they are produced, that is, in the classroom.²⁷

Observation and interviewing of the participants in one particular public school kindergarten classroom, one that was considered by many other school people to be a model, revealed that the social meanings of events and materials were established remarkably early in the school year. As with most classroom settings, the socialization of the children was an overt priority during the opening weeks of school. The four most important skills that the teacher expected the children to learn during those opening weeks were to share, to listen, to put things away, and to follow the classroom routine. Thus, her statement of her goals for the children's early school experiences also constitutes her definition of socialized behavior in the classroom.

The children had no part in organizing the classroom materials and were relatively impotent to affect the course of daily events. The teacher made no special effort to make the children comfortable in the room, nor to reduce their uncertainty about the schedule of activities. Rather than mediating intrusive aspects of the environment, she chose to require that the children accommodate themselves to the materials as presented. When the ongoing noise of another class in the hallway distracted the children, for example, the teacher called for their attention; however, she did not close the door. Similarly, the cubby-holes where the children kept their crayons, smocks, and tennis shoes were not labeled although the children had considerable difficulty remembering which cubby-hole they had been assigned. In spite of many instances of lost crayons and crying children, the teacher refused to permit a student teacher to label the cubby-holes. She told the student teacher that the children must learn to remember their assigned cubby-holes because 'that is their job.' When one girl forgot where her cubby-hole was on the day after they had been assigned, the teacher pointed her out to the class as an example of a 'girl who was not listening yesterday.'

The objects in the classroom were attractively displayed in an apparent invitation for the class to interact with them. Most of the materials were placed on the floor or on shelves within easy reach of the children. However, the opportunities to interact with materials in the classroom were severely circumscribed. The teacher's organization of time in the classroom contradicted the apparent availability of

materials in the physical setting. During most of the kindergarten session, the children were not permitted to handle objects. The materials, then, were organized so that the children learned restraint; they learned to handle things within easy reach only when permitted to do so by the teacher. The children were 'punished' for touching things when the time was not right and praised at moments when they showed restraint. For example, the teacher praised the children for their prompt obedience when, on being told to do so, they quickly stopped bouncing basketballs in the gym; she made no mention of their ball-handling skills.

The teacher made it clear to the children that good kindergarteners were quiet and cooperative. One morning, a child brought two large stuffed dolls to school and sat them in her assigned seat. During the first period of large group instruction, the teacher referred to them, saying, 'Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy are such good helpers! They haven't said a thing all morning.'

As part of learning to exhibit socialized behavior the children learned to tolerate the ambiguity and discomfort of the classroom and to accept a considerable degree of arbitrariness in their school activities. They were required to adjust their emotional responses to conform to those considered appropriate by the teacher. They learned to respond to her personally and to the manner in which she organized the classroom environment.

After some two weeks of kindergarten experience, the children had established a category system for defining and organizing their social reality in the classroom. Their interview responses indicated that the activities in the classroom did not have intrinsic meanings; the children assigned meanings depending on the context in which each was carried on. The teacher presented the classroom materials either as a part of instruction or, more overtly, she discussed and demonstrated their uses to the class. This is critical. The use of a particular object — that is the manner in which we are predisposed to act toward it — constitutes its meaning for us. In defining the meanings of the things in the classroom, then, the teacher defined the relationships between the children and the materials in terms of contextual meanings bound to the classroom environment.

When asked about classroom objects, the children responded with remarkable agreement and uniformity. The children divided the materials into two categories: things to work with and things to play with. No child organized any material in violation of what seemed to be their guiding principle. Those materials that the children used at the direction of the teacher were work materials. These included books, paper, paste, crayons, glue, and other materials traditionally associated with school tasks. No child chose to use these materials during 'play' time,

early in the school year. The materials which the children chose during free time were labeled play materials or toys. These included, among other things, games, small manipulatives, the play house, dolls, and the wagon.

The meaning of classroom materials, then, is derived from the nature of the activity in which they are used. The categories of work and play emerged as powerful organizers of the classroom reality early in the school year. Both the teacher and the children considered work activities more important than play activities. Information which the children said they learned in school were all things that the teacher had told them during activities they called 'work.' 'Play' activities were permitted only if time allowed and if the children had finished their assigned work activities. Observation data revealed that the category of work had several well-defined parameters sharply separating it from the category of play. First, work includes any and all teacher-directed activities; only free-time activities were called 'play' by the children. Activities such as coloring, drawing, waiting in line, listening to stories, watching movies, cleaning up, and singing were called work. To work, then, is to do what one is told to do, no matter the nature of the activity involved.

Second, all work activities, and only work activities, were compulsory. For example, the children were required to draw pictures about specific topics on numerous occasions. During singing, the teacher often interrupted to encourage or exhort the children who were not singing or who were singing too softly. Any choices permitted during work periods were circumscribed to fit the limits of accepted uniform procedure. During an Indian dance, for example, the teacher allowed the 'sleeping' children to snore if they wanted. After a trip to the fire station, all the children were required to draw a picture, but each child was permitted to choose whatever part of the tour he liked best as the subject of his picture. (Of course, it is also true that each child was required to illustrate his favorite part of the trip.) When introducing another art project the teacher said, 'Today you will make a cowboy horse. You can make your horse any color you want, black or grey or brown.' At another time, she announced, with great emphasis, that the children could choose three colors for the flowers they were making from cupcake liners. The children gasped with excitement and applauded. These choices did not change the principle that the children were required to use the same materials in the same manner during work periods. If anything, the nature of the choices emphasized the general principle.

Not only was every work activity required, but every child had to start at the designated time. The entire class worked on all assigned tasks simultaneously. Further, all the children were required to

complete the assigned tasks during the designated work period. In a typical incident, on the second day of school, many children complained that they either could not or did not want to finish a lengthy art project. The teacher said that everyone must finish. One child, on asking if she could finish 'next time,' was told, 'You must finish now.'

In addition to requiring that all the children do the same thing at the same time, work activities also involved the children with the same materials and produced similar or identical products or attainments. During work periods the same materials were presented to the entire class simultaneously, and the same product was expected of each child. All the children were expected to use work materials in the same way. Even seemingly inconsequential procedures had to be followed by every child. For example, after large-group instruction on the second day of school, the teacher told the children, 'Get a piece of paper and your crayons, and go back to your seats.' One child, who got her crayons first, was reminded to get her paper first.

The products or skills, which the children exhibited at the completion of a period of work, were intended to be identical or, at least, similar. The teacher demonstrated most art projects to the entire class before the children got their materials. The children then tried to produce a product as similar to the one the teacher had made as possible. Only those pieces of artwork which were nearly identical to the product the teacher made as demonstration were saved and displayed in the classroom.

Work periods, as defined by the children, then, involved every child working simultaneously, at the same activity, with the same materials, and directed to the same ends. The point of work activities was to do them, not necessarily to do them well. By the second day of school, many children hastily finished their assigned tasks in order to join their friends playing with toys. During music, for example, the teacher exhorted the children to sing loudly. Neither tunefulness, rhythm, purity of tone nor mood were mentioned to the children or expected of them. It was their enthusiastic and lusty participation which was required. Similarly, the teacher accepted any child's art project on which sufficient time had been spent. The assigned tasks were compulsory and identical, and, in accepting all finished products, the teacher often accepted poor or shoddy work. The acceptance of such work nullified any notion of excellence as an evaluative category. Diligence, perseverance, obedience, and participation were rewarded. These are characteristics of the children, not of their work. In this way, the notion of excellence was separated from that of successful or acceptable work and replaced by the criterion of adequate participation.

The children, interviewed in September and again in October, used the categories of work and play to create and describe their social

reality. Their responses indicate that the first few weeks of school are an important time for learning about the nature of work in the classroom. In September, no child said 'work' when asked what children do in kindergarten. In October, half of those interviewed responded with the word 'work.' All the children talked more about working and less about playing in October than they had in September. The teacher was pleased with the progress of the class during the first weeks of school and repeatedly referred to the children as 'my good workers.'

The teacher often justified her presentation of work activities in the classroom in terms of the preparation of the children for elementary school and for adulthood. For example, she believed that work activities should be compulsory because the children needed practice following directions, without their exercising of options, as preparation for the reality of adult work. The children were expected to view kindergarten as a year of preparation for the first grade. In stressing the importance of coloring neatly or sequencing pictures properly, the teacher spoke of the necessity of these skills in first grade, and of the difficulty that children who were inattentive in kindergarten would have the following year.

The children were relatively powerless to influence the flow of daily events, and obedience was more highly valued than ingenuity. Again, this atmosphere was seen as an important bridge between home and future work situations. The teacher expected the children to adjust to the classroom setting and to tolerate whatever level of discomfort that adjustment included.

Thus, as part of their initiation into the kindergarten community, young children also receive their first initiation into the social dimension of the world of work. The content of specific lessons is relatively less important than the experience of being a worker. Personal attributes of obedience, enthusiasm, adaptability, and perseverance are more highly valued than academic competence. Unquestioning acceptance of authority and of the vicissitudes of life in institutional settings are among a kindergarten's first lessons. It is in the progressive acceptance, as natural, as the work *tout court*, of meanings of important and unimportant knowledge, of work and play, of normality and deviance, that these lessons reside.

Beyond a rhetorical humanism

As Gramsci argued, the control of the knowledge preserving and producing sectors of a society is a critical factor in enhancing the ideological dominance of one group of people or one class over less powerful groups of people or classes.²⁸ In this regard, the role of the

school in selecting, preserving, and passing on conceptions of competence, ideological norms, and values (and often only certain social groups' 'knowledge') — all of which are embedded within both the overt and hidden curricula in schools — is of no small moment.

At least two aspects of school life serve distributive, social, and economic functions. As the growing literature on the hidden curriculum shows, and as I have supported with historical and empirical evidence here, the forms of interaction in school life may serve as mechanisms for communicating normative and dispositional meanings to students. Yet, the body of the school knowledge itself — what is included and excluded, what is important and what is unimportant — also often serves an ideological purpose.

As will be demonstrated in Chapter 5, much of the formal content of curricular knowledge is dominated by a consensus ideology. Conflict, either intellectual or normative, is seen as a negative attribute in social life. Thus, there is a peculiar kind of redundancy in school knowledge. Both the everyday experience and the curriculum knowledge itself display messages of normative and cognitive consensus. The deep structure of school life, the basic and organizing framework of commonsense rules that is negotiated, internalized, and ultimately seems to give meaning to our experience in educational institutions, seems closely linked to the normative and communicative structures of industrial life.²⁹ How could it be otherwise?

Perhaps we can expect little more from the school experience than what I have portrayed here, given the distribution of resources in the USA, and given the wishes of a large portion of its citizenry. One hypothesis that should not be dismissed too readily is that, in fact, schools do work. In an odd way, they may succeed in reproducing a population that is roughly equivalent to the economic and social stratification in society. Thus, when one asks of schools, 'Where is their humanness?' perhaps the question may be more difficult to grapple with than the questioner expects.

For example, one could interpret this chapter as a statement against a particular community's commitment to education, or as a negative statement about particular kinds of teachers who are 'less able than they might be.' This would be basically incorrect, I believe. The city where this study was conducted is educationally oriented. It spends a large amount of its resources on schooling and feels that it deserves its reputation as having one of the best school systems in the area, if not the nation.

Just as important, we should be careful not to view this kind of teacher as poorly trained, unsuccessful, or uncaring. Exactly the opposite is often the case. The classroom teacher who was observed is, in fact, perceived as a competent teacher by administrators, colleagues,

and parents. Given this, the teacher's activities must be understood, not merely in terms of the patterns of social interaction that dominate classrooms, but in terms of the wider patterning of social and economic relationships in the social structure of which he or she and the school itself are a part.³⁰

When teachers distribute normative interpretations of, say, work and play like the historical and contemporary ones I have documented here, one must ask, with Sharp and Green, 'to what problems are these viable solutions for the teachers?'³¹ 'What is the commonsense interpretive framework of teachers and to what set of ideological presuppositions does it respond?' In this way, we can situate classroom knowledge and activity within the larger framework of structural relationships which — either through teacher and parent expectations, the classroom material environment, what are considered important problems for teachers to focus on, or the relationship between schools and, say, the economic sector of a society — often determines what goes on in classrooms.

This chapter cannot by itself entirely support the argument that schools seem to act latently to enhance an already unequal and stratified social order. With the other chapters in this book, it does confirm, however, a number of recent analyses that point out how schools, through their distribution of social and ideological categories, contribute to the promotion of a rather static framework of institutions.³² Thus, my argument should not be seen as a statement against an individual school or any particular groups of teachers. Rather, I want to suggest that educators need to see teachers as 'encapsulated' within a social and economic context that by necessity often produces the problems teachers are confronted with and the material limitations on their responses. This very 'external' context provides substantial legitimation for the allocation of teachers' time and energies and for the kinds of cultural capital embodied in the school itself.³³

If this is the case, as I strongly suggest it is, the questions we ask must go beyond the humanistic level (without losing their humanistic and emancipatory intent) to a more relational approach. While educators continue to ask what is wrong in schools and what can be done — can our problems be 'solved' with more humanistic teachers, more openness, better content, and so on — it is of immense import that we begin to take seriously the questions of 'In whose interest do schools often function today?' and 'What is the relation between the distribution of cultural capital and economic capital?' and finally, 'Can we deal with the political and economic realities of creating institutions which enhance meaning and lessen control?'

Sharp and Green summarize this concern about a rhetorical humanism rather well.³⁴

[We] want to stress that a humanist concern for the child necessitates a greater awareness of the limits within which teacher autonomy can operate, and to pose the questions. 'What interests do schools serve, those of the parents and children, or those of the teachers and headmaster?' and 'What wider interests are served by the school?', and, possibly more importantly, 'How do we conceptualize "interests" in social reality?' Therefore instead of seeing the classroom as a social system and as such insulated from wider structural processes, we suggest that the teacher who has developed an understanding of his [or her] location in the wider process may well be in a better position to understand where and how it is possible to alter that situation. The educator who is of necessity a moralist must preoccupy himself with the social and [economic] preconditions for the achievement of his ideals. Rather than affirming the separation of politics and education, as is done with commonsense liberal assumptions, the authors assume all education to be in its implications a political process.

Thus, to isolate school experience from the complex totality of which it is a constitutive part is to be a bit too limited in one's analysis. In fact, the study of the relationship between ideology and school knowledge is especially important for our understanding of the larger social collectivity of which we are all a part. It enables us to begin to see how a society reproduces itself, how it perpetuates its conditions of existence through the selection and transmission of certain kinds of cultural capital on which a complex yet unequal industrial society depends, and how it maintains cohesion among its classes and individuals by propagating ideologies that ultimately sanction the existing institutional arrangements which may cause the unnecessary stratification and inequality in the first place. Can we afford not to understand these things?

Yet, as I noted in Chapter 1, a full understanding that seeks to go beyond the positivistic models which now dominate our consciousness must combine an analysis of what actually happens in schools with an appraisal of its growth, of its *history*. Only by combining these two can we see why these everyday experiences are what they are. And it is to this expanded history that we shall now turn.

Chapter 4

Curricular history and social control

(with Barry Franklin)

It should be getting clearer by now that one of the ways schools are used for hegemonic purposes is in their teaching of cultural and economic values and dispositions that are supposedly 'shared by all,' while at the same time 'guaranteeing' that only a specified number of students are selected for higher levels of education because of their 'ability' to contribute to the maximization of the production of the technical knowledge also needed by the economy. This focus on valuative consensus in the everyday regularities of school life and the concomitant teaching of economic dispositions to children, did not spring up overnight, however. It has had a long history in American education. Both this chapter and the next will focus on that problem. First, we shall examine in considerably more detail than in Chapter 3 how it came about historically through the school's response to ideological and economic conflicts among classes at a time of rapid change from an economy based on agricultural capital to one rooted in industrial capital in the beginnings of this century. As we shall see, schools were not necessarily built to enhance or preserve the cultural capital of classes or communities other than the most powerful segments of the population. The *hegemonic role of the intellectual*, of the professional educator, in this development is quite clear.

Then, to show that the emphasis on ideological hegemony is not 'merely' of historical interest but still dominates the very core of classroom life, we shall return in Chapter 5 to the current formal corpus of school knowledge and investigate the emphasis on consensus again.

- Visions and Realities*, Richard H. Weller, ed. (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1977), pp. 249-69. My analysis here is indebted to his own.
- 38 Andrew Hacker, 'Cutting Classes,' *New York Review of Books*, XXIII (May, 1976), 15. Hacker notes that at full employment our economy can usefully use only about 43 per cent of the work age population. It is not profitable to employ more than that. 'Some of the unnecessary 57 per cent become housewives, college students, or retire on moderate pensions. Others, however, must settle for a lifetime of poverty because the economic system offers them no alternatives.'
 - 39 Geoff Whitty and Michael F. D. Young, 'The Politics of School Knowledge,' *Times Educational Supplement*, 5 September 1973, 20.
 - 40 This is an empirical claim, of course, and is falsifiable. There are a number of educators and scientists who would take issue with such a simplification of science and mathematics. See, for example, Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1970). What aspects of scientific 'paradigms' are stable is being argued right now. See Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds, *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 1970) and Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding* (Princeton University Press, 1972).
 - 41 Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).
 - 42 The close relationship between academic curricula, the distribution of scarce resources, and the labeling and tracking of high school students is documented in James E. Rosenbaum, *Making Inequality* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976).
 - 43 Young, 'An Approach to the Study of Curriculum as Socially Organized Knowledge,' op. cit., p. 34.
 - 44 Habermas's analysis of how purposive/rational or instrumental forms of language and action have come to dominate our consciousness is illuminating here. Cf., Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) and Michael W. Apple, 'The Process and Ideology of Valuing in Educational Settings,' *Educational Evaluation: Analysis and Responsibility*, Michael W. Apple, et al., eds (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1974), pp. 3-34. We would want to trace the growth in status of purposive/rational forms of action within the concomitant growth of particular economic systems. Raymond Williams's corpus of work provides essential models for this kind of inquiry. See his *The Long Revolution*, op. cit. and *The Country and the City*, op. cit.
 - 45 Reviews of some of the relevant research on the question of hegemony can be found in David W. Livingstone, 'On Hegemony in Corporate Capitalist States,' *Sociological Inquiry*, XLVI (nos 3 and 4, 1976), 235-50 and R. W. Connell, op. cit., especially Chapters 7-10.
 - 46 See also, Herbert Gintis and Samuel Bowles, 'Educational Reform

- in the U.S.: An Historical and Statistical Survey' (New York: The World Bank, March 1977, mimeographed).
- 47 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, op. cit., pp. 298-9.
 - 48 Henry M. Levin, 'A Radical Critique of Educational Policy' (Stanford, California: Occasional Paper of the Stanford University Evaluation Consortium, March, 1977, mimeographed), pp. 26-7.
 - 49 Basil Bernstein has made some intriguing inroads into this area in his 'Aspects of the Relations Between Education and Production' in Bernstein, op. cit. See also, Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1975) and Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism* (New York: Norton, 1976).
 - 50 See the interesting essay by John W. Meyer, op. cit. Randall Collins's attempt to articulate a theory of cultural markets, in 'Some Comparative Principles of Educational Stratification,' *Harvard Educational Review*, XLVII (February, 1977), 1-27, is also of some assistance here. It is a bit conceptually confused, though. See my reply to him in *Harvard Educational Review*, XLVII (November 1977), 601-2.
 - 51 William Finar, ed., *Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists* (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1975).
 - 52 Walter Feinberg, *Reason and Rhetoric: The Intellectual Foundations of Twentieth Century Liberal Educational Policy* (New York: John Wiley, 1975).

Chapter 3: Economics and control in everyday school life

- 1 Charles Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom* (New York: Random House, 1970).
- 2 Herbert Gintis and Samuel Bowles, 'The Contradictions of Liberal Educational Reform,' *Work, Technology, and Education*, Walter Feinberg and Henry Rosemont, Jr, eds (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), p.109.
- 3 That this is not merely an 'intellectual' interest, but embodies social and ideological commitments will be examined in greater depth in Chapter 6.
- 4 Michael F. D. Young, 'Knowledge and Control,' *Knowledge and Control*, Michael F. D. Young, ed. (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), p. 8.
- 5 John Kennett, 'The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu,' *Educational Review*, XXV (June, 1973), 238.
- 6 On the necessity of seeing institutions relationally, see Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971).
- 7 Daniel Kallos, 'Educational Phenomena and Educational Research' (Report from the Institute of Education, Number 54, University of Lund, Lund, Sweden, mimeographed), p. 7.

- 8 Dennis Warwick, 'Ideologies, Integration and Conflicts of Meaning,' *Educability, Schools and Ideology*, Michael Flude and John Ahier, eds. (London: Halstead Press, 1974), p. 94. See also, Michael W. Apple, 'Curriculum as Ideological Selection,' *Comparative Education Review*, XX (June 1976) 209-15.
- 9 Bill Williamson, 'Continuities and Discontinuities in the Sociology of Education,' in Flude and Ahier, op. cit., pp. 10-11.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Barry Franklin, 'The Curriculum Field and the Problem of Social Control, 1918-1938: A Study in Critical Theory,' (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1974), pp. 2-3.
- 12 Ibid., pp. 4-5. See also, Steven Selden, 'Conservative Ideologies and Curriculum,' *Educational Theory*, XXVII (Summer 1977), 205-22. It should be noted here that scientific management itself was not necessarily a neutral technology for creating more efficient institutions. It was developed as a mechanism for the further division and control of labor. This is provocatively portrayed in Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid., p. 317.
- 15 Walter Feinberg, *Reason and Rhetoric: The Intellectual Foundations of Twentieth Century Liberal Educational Policy* (New York: John Wiley, 1975).
- 16 Philip Jackson, *Life in Classrooms* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968).
- 17 Elizabeth Vallance, 'Hiding the Hidden Curriculum,' *Curriculum Theory Network*, IV (Fall, 1973/1974), 15.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid., 18-19.
- 20 Gintis and Bowles, op. cit., p. 133. These normative meanings and personality attributes are distributed unequally to different 'types' of students, often by social class or occupational expectation, as well. Not all students get the same dispositional elements nor are the same meanings attached to them by the distributor of cultural capital. See Gintis and Bowles, op. cit., p. 136.
- 21 See, for example, Michael W. Apple, 'Ivan Illich and Deschooling Society: The Politics of Slogan Systems,' *Social Forces and Schooling*, Nobuo Shimahara and Adam Scrupski, eds (New York: David McKay, 1975), pp. 337-60 and Michael F. D. Young, 'An Approach to the Study of Curricula as Socially Organized Knowledge,' in Young, *Knowledge and Control*, op. cit., pp. 19-46.
- 22 Nell Keddie, 'Classroom Knowledge,' in Michael F. D. Young, *Knowledge and Control*, op. cit., pp. 133-60.
- 23 See John Eggleston, *The Sociology of the School Curriculum* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).
- 24 This, of course, is a fundamental tenet of ethnomethodological

- studies, as well. See Peter McHugh, *Defining the Situation* (Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), Roy Turner, ed. *Ethnomethodology* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1974), and Aaron Cicourel, *Cognitive Sociology* (New York: Free Press, 1974).
- 25 For further explication of this point, see Basil Bernstein, 'On The Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge,' in Michael F. D. Young, ed., *Knowledge and Control*, op. cit., pp. 47-69.
- 26 Robert MacKay, 'Conceptions of Children and Models of Socialization,' *Childhood and Socialization*, Hans Peter Drietzal, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 27-43.
- 27 An excellent treatment of this 'ethnographic' tradition can be found in Philip E. D. Robinson, 'An Ethnography of Classrooms,' *Contemporary Research in the Sociology of Education*, John Eggleston, ed. (London: Methuen, 1974), pp. 251-66. For further discussion of these methodological issues, and for further analysis of the data on which this section of the chapter is based, see Nancy R. King, 'The Hidden Curriculum and the Socialization of Kindergarten Children' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1976).
- 28 Thomas R. Bates; 'Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXXVI (April-June, 1975), 360.
- 29 Habermas's arguments about patterns of communicative competence in advanced industrial 'orders' are quite interesting as interpretive schema here. See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, 'Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence,' *Recent Sociology*, no. 2, Hans Peter Drietzal, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 115-48, and Trent Schroyer, *The Critique of Domination* (New York: George Braziller, 1973).
- 30 Rachel Sharp and Anthony Green, *Education and Social Control: A Study in Progressive Primary Education* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 8.
- 31 Ibid., p. 13.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 110-12. See also, the provocative analysis found in Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control, Volume 3: Towards a Theory of Educational Transmissions* (2nd edn; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).
- 33 Ibid., p. 116.
- 34 Sharp and Green, op. cit., p. x.

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- 1 Here I am using Dawe's notion that control involves the imposition of meaning on a dominated group by a dominant group. See, Michael F. D. Young, ed., *Knowledge and Control* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), p. 4.
- 2 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Intellectual Field and Creative Project,' in Young, *Knowledge and Control*, op. cit., pp. 161-88.