Class Issues: A Critical Ethnography of Corporate Domination within the Classroom

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Abstract

The narratives assembled in this critical ethnography draw from the experiential frameworks that give meaning to the visible and invisible hand of corporatism within education. The study follows the critical ethnographic method suggested by Carspecken as a lens in which to view a public school. The aggregate interpretations which emanate are a collage of behavioral patterns that illuminate the impact of corporatism upon individuals as they emerge from childhood into adulthood via the education highway.

The impact of neoliberal capitalism (economies' shift to imperfect competition, big monopolies, and oligarchies), is, as Giroux (2005) argues, that democracy becomes synonymous with free markets. This phenomenon impacts negatively issues of equality, justice, and freedom. Further, Steinberg and Kinchloe (1997) explain that the crisis society is now facing finds its roots in childhood, or the "Kinderculture" associated with corporations performing the task of childhood educator. Educational organizations, designed for the good of the whole are being methodically supplanted by commercial concerns enmeshed with the ideal of individual gain. If people operate under the assumption that learning changes one's identity, then how and what we learn becomes the blueprint for enculturation. Most importantly, these issues encompass educational systems.

Corporate positioning is the invisible force operating in the background of the educational system. Communication that surpasses the structure of allowable boundaries set by corporate capitalists is not acceptable in the

> *educational system. The language of corporate capital is the language of domination and power. The language of corporate education must conform to what Scott (1990) calls the "public transcript" - the representation of reality favored by dominant groups and performed endlessly by members of oppressed groups as evidence of their desire to share in the rewards and benefits apportioned out by those in power. Indeed, Deetz (1992) argues that the 1980's and 1990's have seen public discourse shift in North America and Europe from questions of equality to questions concerning performance standards, efficiency, accountability, and career utility. Derrida (2001) has suggested that education should be grounded in a politic that makes democratization the crux of pedagogy. All too often, however, it seems the language of the marketplace has replaced concerns about justice.*
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> *Significant in the discussion is the idea that critical education has become lost within the confines of journal debates at the expense of those most indigent. Indeed, Henry Giroux, (1992) notes in his work that: Locked within traditional disciplinary boundaries and recycling old orthodoxies, many critical educators risk becoming like shadows dancing on the wall of an obscure academic conference, oblivious to an outside world that is filled with real threats to democracy, society, and the schools. (p. 1)*

The Manager Paradigm

With the loss of voices of opposition, the work of teaching is being reconstructed into institutional corporate managerialism. This study portrays the impact of schools and teachers whose voices are replaced by corporate voices. Willis (1977) illustrates the beginnings of this trend in his ethnography on the transition of school to work in working class boys. Indeed, Cremin's (1974) suggestion that universal education is the key to the dream of equality is found wanting due to the fact that education has taken on the mantle of corporate ideology. Giroux (2004a) explains that education should "in part, be premised on the assumption that educators vigorously resist any attempt on the part of liberals or conservatives to reduce their role in schools to either that of

technicians or corporate pawns." Unfortunately, teachers have often adopted corporatism in order to hold on to their positions.

The body politic insists upon recreating schooling in its own image; that being corporate hegemony. The opposite should be true. Dean (2000) posits that educators should be encouraging students upon how to think beyond corporate hegemony and "how arrangements might be otherwise (p. 3). The point becomes that the cost of creating such "workers of efficiency" will be a loss of autonomy, non-participation in decision making, a denial of democratic freedom, and a lack of personal development through work. Indeed, already apparent is that languages of management supersede languages of intellectual freedom in classrooms. Deetz (1992) notes how thinly disguised authoritorianism revels within the boundaries of "proper management techniques" in school systems. Ball (1990) argues that "management is firmly established as the one best way to run educational organizations" (p. 153). As the model of school as factory becomes firmly entrenched within the American educational system, training of exclusionary professional managers grows. The model leads to binary polar opposites. On the one hand are authoritarian managers, on the other, those who would be managed. In some school districts, "School to Work" programs have been adopted that guarantee a corporate model in schools as well as society. School to Work brings with it the training courses, the discourse, the curriculum, and the culture of the corporate entity. In this situation the teacher tends to emerge as an alienated technocrat, performing his/her trade solely for corporate hegemony. Pupil as worker, teacher as technocrat and principal as manager is fast becoming the model for an "efficient" school training ground. Apple (1986) illuminates the situation by explaining:

> Currently considerable pressure is building to have teaching and school curricula be totally prespecified and tightly controlled by the purposes of efficiency, cost effectiveness and accountability. In many ways, the deskilling that is affecting jobs in general is now having an impact on teachers as more and more decisions are moving out of their hands as their jobs become even more difficult. (p. 155)

Aronowitz (2004) notes that the working class is distinguished neither by what it earns nor by its power to consume material goods, but rather by "its lack of relative power over the terms and conditions of employment" (p. 26). This managerialism is a theoretical supposition that is geared toward technology, efficiency, practicality and

most importantly, control. It subsumes individual desire to the voracity of the technical machine. It is a system that suggests society may be explained and controlled through operationalized, law-like generalizations. Ultimately, and tragically, the emphasis of management systems depends upon consensus. Consensus is most easily consummated when no voice of opposition emanates. An overview of educational research illustrates that oppositional voices are, at best, a hoarse whisper.

Review of the Literature

Corporatism and Fascism in Society

Fascism should more properly be called corporatism because it is the merger of state and corporate power. -- Benito Mussolini

Saul, (1996) when discussing corporate control in society, notes that corporatism is growing once again, not unlike the 1920's and 30's. Indeed, Saul argues that "(1) power is directed towards economic and social groups, (2) entrepreneurial initiatives are being introduced in areas normally reserved for public bodies, and (3) there is an erasure of divisions between the public and private interest. This is the essence of the fascist state.

Fascism, a term created by the Italians, was also called "estato corporativo" or "the corporatist state" (Smith, 1994) and is rightly described by George Orwell as an extension of capitalism. It is not hyperbole to call today's economy fascist corporatism. Today's economy is one where the rights and power of the corporation are what should be owned by the citizen. It is a system in which corporations, with government facilitation, provide order, nationalism and success. The dangers are conspicuous and colossal. Simply stated, once the corporations interests become indivisible from that of the state, national security equates corporate security. The impending hazards are enormous. Once a corporation's interest becomes indivisible from that of the state, it becomes a matter of state security to protect the corporation. It then becomes citizens' patriotic duty to support the interests of multinational corporations. The social contract is altered. Corporations force citizens to give their loyalty to the corporation rather than the government.

Language and Corporate Fascism

Saul (1996) explains once the corporate economy takes hold, language loses meaning except in how it upholds the corporation. One purpose of this paper is to illustrate how language in education is used as a foundation for corporate fascism. It is not that language itself controls, but how language is utilized in order to develop and maintain control. Chomsky (1991) notes, that corporate fascism is quite real and utilizes language, or the lack thereof, as a method of control:

> ...but there are also a number of things that are very bad. One is the breakdown of independent social organization and independent thought, the atomization of people. As we move towards a society which is optimal from the point of view of the business classes - namely, that each individual is an atom, lacking means to communicate with others so that he or she can't develop independent thought or action and is just a consumer, not a producer - people become deeply alienated, and they may hate what's going on but have no way to express that hatred.

People's theories concerning the world are bounded and acted upon through language.

Giroux and Kellner (2000) argue that unless a new theoretical paradigm complete with a new language of political activism filters into the educational process democracy will suffer. Already we observe that society has decayed. Boggs (2000) notes that by any given set of criteria the educational and political systems are in a state of entropy and nearly decayed beyond recognition. Boggs argues,

> ...capitalism has trumpeted the virtues of free and open access to the public sphere linked to classical Lockean ideals ... and has produced more or less the opposite: a Hobbesian world of chaos and fragmentation where democratic participation has become a chimera (p. 11).

Education in a Corporate World

The consequence of schools as marketplace (Ball, 1990) is not only deceptive, but dangerous (Baudrillard, 1983). Ulichny (1997) argues that the school as marketplace model moves society ever closer to an educational system where an elite class receives the education that prepares them for the jobs that move the nation, while the rest of the citizenry is prepared for unskilled, service jobs. Darmanin (2002) notes in her study of the HSBC Bank's partnership with Malta's schools that the introduction of corporate power into the educational process leads to the corporation becoming the

primary agent, agenda setter and major beneficiary of the partnership. It impacts what students think and eventually their actions.

The corporate domination paradigm correspondingly entrenches other repressive control paradigms prevalent throughout society. For example Dei, Mazzuco, McIsaac, & Zine (1997) argue in their work concerning black student disengagement that "migration stress, family disorganization, domestic responsibility, culturally based tests, low teacher expectations, and low socio-economic status are among the variables that affect the educational process of racial minority youth" (p. 12). All of these can be placed in the lap of corporate influence. In education, it is imperative to critically investigate economic structures as entrenchment tools for authoritarian domination within the schooling system. Wexler (1992), for example, has described sequential epochs of corporatism in education. The first period led to the privatization of education through a series of voluntary partnerships between business and schools. The second period, nicknamed the "Toyota School," features the disintegration of most public interference and schools are restructured to reflect the demands of a Post-Fordist work regime. Finally, Wexler explains that the "new corporatism entails a complex new corporate dogma that lies at the design and control level which redefines student's knowledge" (p. 8). In these "societies of control" (Deleuze, 1992, p. 4) individuals are transformed into statistics, parts of samples, or data in a participatory set.

Ultimately, the atmosphere of culture itself binds the actions of individuals. Rushkoff (1999), for example, argues that the creation of coercive environments depends upon exciting and disorienting people. For example, glitzy shopping malls are often designed so that people become lost. Giroux (2001) illustrates the intentionality of this corporate culture making and how it touches the lives of students and adults alike by describing the impact of Disney upon society (exciting and disorienting through myth making). Both Rushkoff and Giroux depict how, through the intentional development of a consensual corporate control, global multinationals secure forms of authority. This is also certainly true in the classroom.

Theoretical Rationale

Conventional ethnography within the interpretivist research tradition offers advantages over positivistic work. The distinction between interpretivism and positivism is, of course, based on philosophical grounds. Positivism is grounded upon quantitative, reductionist methods. Interpretivism, conversely, is associated with philosophies found in qualitative research, ethnography, and phenomenology. While interpretive ethnography is surpasses positivism in its ability to provide understanding, it, as Angus (1986) explains, has limitations. The research tradition is limited by its ideological presuppositions. Fay (1977) as cited in Angus (1986) points out that in this tradition:

> ...there is no room for an examination of the conditions which give rise to the actions, rules and beliefs which it seeks to explicate, and, more particularly, it does not provide a means whereby one can study the relationships between the structural elements of a social order and the possible forms of behavior and beliefs which such elements engender. (p. 63)

Ethnography, because of its descriptive nature, is unable to provide a method to address conflict associated with structured society. Ethnography is inherently conservative in that intrepretivist tradition tends to entrench the philosophy. "Interpretative research presents and reinforces an image of society in which social tensions are rooted, not in relations of domination and alienation, but merely in the breakdown in communication between actors..." (Angus, 1986, p. 64). Ethnography reconciles people to their social order. Instead of substantiating intrinsic inequality, conventional ethnography validates social practice as inherently rational. The crux of conventional ethnography simply describes problematic societal breakdowns, instead of providing theory which might create paradigmatic shift. Critical ethnography, conversely, could alter the foundation of social mores, thereby removing inequality and injustice. Conventional ethnography tends to uphold the status quo. Critical ethnography tends to reinforce change. Critical ethnography, according to Maseman (1982):

> ...refers to studies which use a basically anthropological, qualitative participant observer methodology, but which rely for their theoretical formulation on a body of theory deriving critical sociology and philosophy. (p. 1)

Critical ethnography follows the central tenet of critical theory which goes beyond simple description and propels the analysis into a framework of what could be (Simon and Dippo, 1986).

Anderson (1989) argues that critical ethnographers seek research activities sensitive to the relationship between social structures and the autonomy of human actors. The overriding concern of critical ethnography is to "free individuals from domination and repression" (p. 249). Critical ethnography makes no apology for being openly ideological (Lather, 1986). This has, of course, led to criticism of the method by both interpretivists and positivists (Erickson, 1986; Cazden, 1983; Edmonds, 1979). The critical ethnographer's concern to unveil domineering social structures and the underlying (often hidden) interests they represent, makes decisions concerning validity, as defined by positivistic and interpretivist camps, difficult. The essence of much of the criticism in educational critical ethnography lies in the areas of validity and praxis, i.e. how can one achieve changes in social structure when those social structures forbid change? Lather (1986) best answers the validity question when she reconceptualizes validity in a critical mode. To Lather, validity is achieved when the research process "re-orients, focuses, and energizes in what Freire (1973) terms "consonscientization" (p. 67). Validity is achieved if respondents further self-understanding and, ideally, self-determination through their participation in the research. Praxis, inversely, may be met by reflecting on the roles and positionalities co-constructed between researcher and participant as well as presenting opportunities to participants to raise consciousness concerning systemic inequities of class, race and gender (Ulichny, 1997, p. 139).

The Choice of Critical Ethnography

My work as an educator and researcher is inherently intertwined with my politics. I believe that structures exist in society that not only allow, but enhance underlying inequities in society. These inequities are empirical and are easily noted in the socio-economic fabric of society. Systems of power, that transcend materialism, are also an element tied to demographic, ethnic, and gender considerations. School acts as a fundamental catalyst for the expansion and ultimate convergence of the philosophy of a society. Indeed, it seems that the classroom has become the test tube where the inequities of capitalistic corporate power are fermented. These beliefs and

assumptions inhibit the use of other methods because the methods often operate under the guise of neutrality, detachment, and objectivity.

Research Question

The dream of equal educational opportunity for all citizens in this country is devastated by the corporate model. Not only does the model serve to distance poorer, working class students from opportunity; it even damages those in the middle class. Nevertheless, equality of educational opportunity is seemingly uncontested as a RHETORICAL value in the United States. However, corporate ambivalence about that value seems strikingly evident. Calls for a dismantling of public schooling through voucher initiatives permeate elections', while, at the same time, intensely engaging in debate and rhetoric about what will improve our schools is in vogue. Unfortunately, little debate about what the PURPOSE of our schools in a capitalistic, neo-conservative atmosphere is taking place. There is much talk about increasing work skill levels in school-age students, yet, as a nation, we are also facing the fact that the availability of these demanding jobs is limited. A more probable predication of job markets is one that will employ some workers in highly and moderately demanding jobs but many more in the dead-end service sector (Aronowitz & DiFazio, 1994). Therefore this research is guided by one overarching research question:

How does the public school system reinforce corporate processes that determine the perceptions of students toward themselves as well as student perceptions toward socio-economic conditions to which they are destined?

Methodology

Method Rationale

Carspecken (1996) argues that

> we (critical ethnographers) must share a concern with social theory and some of the basic issues with which it has struggled since the beginning of the 19th century. These include the nature of social structure, power, culture, and human agency (p. x).

Carspecken's (1996) work, illustrating the foundations of critical qualitative research, provides a platform on which I stand. This activist stance works to "unearth, disrupt, and transform existing ideological and/or institutional arrangements" (p. xi). Critical qualitative writers:

...position themselves as political and interrogative beings, fully explicit about their original positions, and about where their research actually took them as investigators and as political actors. (p. xi)

Carspecken (1996) offers a five-stage scheme or framework in order to conduct critical qualitative research. These five include 1) compiling the primary record through qualitative collection of data; 2) preliminary reconstructive analysis; 3) discovering dialogical data generation; 4) describing system relations; 5) using system relationships to explain the findings. I utilized this five step method as I undertook the project.

Stage one includes providing a rich, thick description of the subjects in order to compile the primary record. I conducted fieldwork in order to illuminate complex social relationships. Carspecken (1996) argues that the technique he utilizes is termed the "method of priority observation," or taking the record of everything the subject says or does in field observations as thickly as possible. During observational sessions I shifted focus roughly every 5 minutes in order to observe a new individual as the priority person. During observations I was as unobtrusive as possible in order to eliminate researcher effect.

Building a primary record prioritizes the validity claim of the research. Carspecken (1996) argues that the primary record is a "sort of massive claim to represent what took place in a manner any observer or participant would report under ideal conditions" (p. 88). In order to insure the validation claim, I used a number of research procedures. For example, I used a recording devices, a flexible observation schedule, wrote with a low inference vocabulary, used peer debriefing, and used participant checks to insure validity. The point of this is to insure that I was able to claim events occur frequently or infrequently as indicated by the observations.

During the second stage of the research, the investigator begins to speculate as to the meanings of the observations. I began to discover normative and subjective references, as well as concretely articulate themes in the data. I also began to observe roles and modes of interactive power. Coding begins here. This stage is coined "reconstructive analysis" because it reconstructs into "explicit discourse, cultural and subjective factors that are largely tacit in nature" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 93). During this stage, I also began to look for interactive power. I drew a list noted the type of power (either claimed or observed) associated with individuals within the study. I also investigated areas of normative as well as coerced power. As thematic areas of power began to ascend to the forefront and were recognized, then I began to further analyze situation in terms of cultural milieu. Validity requirements for stage two included conducting member checks and using peer debriefing.

Stage three included gathering data through interviews. Qualitative interview questions and protocol were developed in a manner that allowed for maximum flexibility. As Carspecken (1996) suggests, I used two to five lead off interview questions and from these questions used other, more probing questions as the interviews progressed. Validity checks included recording the interview, matching observations to interview questions, using non-leading questions, peer debriefers and member checks, and finally encouraging subjects to use and explain terms in a naturalistic manner.

Stages four and five seek to explain the meaning of the study. Any number of theoretical concepts makes it possible to link the analysis to systems of power and subordination. I was able to suggest reasons for the experiences and structures the subjects encountered. Answers to questions concerning class, race, gender, and the politics of society were found in the study.

Carspecken (1996) suggests that it is the fifth stage that truly gives the study its force and contributes to real social change. Recent research (Apple, 1993, Bowles & Gintis; 1976, Giroux, 2005, 2004a, 2004b, Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Gitlin, 1983; McCarthy 1990) that emphasizes critical qualitative procedures and examination of the structures of the educational system is helpful in resisting the institutional processes that enforce unequal outcomes, undemocratic processes, racism, sexism, and classism. This study, like those before it, hope demonstrates how the structural processes of

schooling are implemented upon the students. Research, ethically, should be pursued in order to help the participants.

This project falls within that democratic framework.

Setting, Observations, and Participants

The specific qualitative methods adopted for this study were observation and interview. The setting of the research site was a small rural school in the Midwest. Before entering my graduate program I had taught at the school for several years. This eased access into the school as both the administration and many of the teachers knew me from that previous faculty post. Upon gaining consent from the administration of the school, a series of four observations were held during the course of a semester that provided rich, thick description of the schooling process. In the school I worked with the senior high counselor who acted as gatekeeper in gaining access to specific classrooms. In order to investigate specific areas related to corporatism, corporate influence, and managerialism in the education process, I observed a number of classes ranging from vo-tech (FutureFarmers of America, Home Economic Related Occupations, Future Business Leaders of America) to Honors English. In general the observational research went smoothly. The principal and counselor were extremely helpful and cooperative in accommodating the observational research process.

One aspect of the study deserving particular notice is that the demographics of the school had evolved tremendously over a period of three years. A national food chain constructed several meat processing plants in the area during the time period. Immigrating to the area was a large Hispanic population that worked in the plants. The school, which in 1992, had been nearly 100% Caucasian now boasted a demographic of nearly 25% Hispanic students.

Interviews

In designing the research, I envisioned particular issues that would guide the interview process. The schedule was structured in such a manner that the participants could easily understand the question being posed. Once overall thematic questions were answered, I probed further into the responses by the participants in order to provide

further clarification as to what the participant meant. Once the interviews were finished, they were transcribed, coded, and analyzed in order develop thematic categories. These categories were then compared to observational categories and general themes were teased from the comparison. Validity checks, as earlier described, were conducted in order to validate the research findings.

Interview participants were chosen from a pool of students that had graduated from the school two years earlier. Eleven interviews were conducted of students who had been taught in this particular school during all 13 years of their public education experience. I chose to interview students who had already graduated in order to grasp their unique conceptions of how their educational experience had impacted their lives. The hope inherent in this study is to provide empowerment to those in and impacted by the educational system. Upon completion, of the observations and interviews, I followed Carspecken's stages four and five, which calls for the discovery of system relations and to seek explanation of the findings through social-theoretical models.

Results

The narratives assemble in this critical ethnography draw from the experiential frameworks that give meaning to the visible and invisible hand of corporatism within education. The aggregate interpretation which emanates is a collage of behavioral patterns that illuminate the impact of corporatism upon individuals as they emerge from childhood into adulthood via the education highway. The oppressive force that chains democratic thought, action, and behaviors, as well as the hopes and dreams of people caught in the repressive web of corporate managerialism is described not only in educational settings, but also as a pervasive construct that rules individuals' lives. The results of this research are apportioned into two sections. The first elucidates the nature of the language of corporatism and managerialism within the confines of the classroom experience. The second illustrates the meanings behind the utility of education as displayed by those involved in the educational process as investigated under the rubric of social control by corporate mindset.

The Language of Corporatism

Kramer (1997) argues:

> The notion of a standard language, like Standard English, came to symbolize a cultural conservatism that is ultimately ethnocentric, if not fascistic. In my view, a language, whether artificial or natural, is an instrument that may be replaced or modified according to our needs, like any other instrument. If we think in language then we can change our minds by changing the very instrument which formulates the mind. (p. 11)

Kramer's argument is a poignant and guides the first portion of this research. If language determines meaning, thereby formulating the way humanity thinks, then the dominant paradigm of consciousness by individuals is determined by the overarching language utilized by the populace. In the educational arena, the curriculum being taught becomes the language of the educational process. The question becomes, what language do schools speak? The following narratives speak to the question of corporate language being the dominant language within the educational system and illuminate the impact of the language on the children that permeate the educational process.

Gina had spent 13 years being educated within the same school system. She had graduated, became pregnant, and given birth to a baby girl. She lived with the child's father in a mobile home on a dirt road, not far from the town in which she had grown. She worked at the colloquial "chicken factory" killing and feathering the birds forty hours each week. Gina described her life:

> I hate what I am doing now. I mean it’s like...six days a week - 8, 9, or 10 hours a day up to my waist in those damn birds. It stinks. Look at my hands (O.C. - she shows me her hands; they are dried and cracked) I never thought I would be doing this or that I feel this way. But what am I going to do about it? It is just the way life is. I wish that there were other things to do, I mean, it’s like I have Ellie (O.C. - Ellie is Gina's child's nickname) and I have to take care of her. Gary (O.C. - Gina's husband who works at a local convenience store) tries but he ain't making enough money for, uh, like us to live on. We all make choices, I guess, but I, uh, would not be doing this if I could have found a way out. It's funny, I think that if my parents would have been different, or if we could have had somebody in school to show us that this is what life would be like here, we sure as hell would have figured a way to get out.

Gina's narrative illustrates the implications of language that impacted her during her formative years. The ways in which people frame their understanding of what possibilities are offered are transcended as well as constrained by the language that they are taught and use. Gina for example, perceives it impossible to go beyond the boundaries of what language had presented to her. Ideological positions are cemented by communicative practice. For example, Gina, in an explanation of why she did not attend college stated:

> College was never for poor girls like me. Oh, I know that in a God-damned perfect world, money, or what your parents, like, do, shouldn't make any difference, but you just know it does. The counselor at school would, like, talk to the rich kids about what college they would attend and all that shit, but to kids like me, we always took, maybe FHA, (O.C. - acronym for Future Homemakers of America) cause that was easy and they expected us too, cause we couldn't do anything else. It's kinda funny, cause I could always like do math pretty good, but no one ever asked if I wanted to take trig or nothing. No, Gina got her B in algebra, good for fuckin' her, now go do future farmers so you can be good at pulling the feathers out of chickens. (O.C. - Gina became very upset during this part of the interview. The emotion, i.e., envy, or jealousy she felt toward "rich kids" is obvious)

Observations and other responses provided further examples of individualized and language bounded world-views in which individuals are subjugated to authoritarian elitist regimes. These views may be argued to form the basis of consensual abdication of personal autonomy and freedom by segments of the population that are repressed by the overarching language of the dominant paradigm. Christy, another former student in the school, works as a sales clerk in the local supermarket. She still lives with her parents (two years after graduation) and takes classes at a community college forty miles from the town. Her decisions are also not framed as free choice but a reaction to circumstance:

> ...it’s as if...you do what you have to do; it means that sure if you got a lot of cash or marry the right guy then you can like, have a life that isn't hard. You can go to the right school and meet the right type of people and become somebody. And that would be great, but, c'mon, I'll be lucky if I can just get a nice house and a nice guy and, like, not have to worry about having all kinds of money problems.

Interestingly, some students isolated conditions that pointed to the notions of a "hidden curriculum" (Willis, 1977; Bowles and Gintis 1976) which propagate,

through language, the world-views of the dominant paradigm. Robert, who joined the Marines upon graduation, noted that respective attitudes and language among teachers and administrators played a large role in the decision making process of students.

> I just wanted out of that town, man. There wasn't nothing, uh, there, for somebody like me. And, you know, there was no way I was going to make it to college. I heard that enough from everybody, like, my folks and teachers, and once the principal after I got into trouble told me I wasn't ever go be nothing unless I learned how to work...Everybody expects you to work hard, but nobody ever says it will get you anything. I mean I work hard now; hell, I got through basic, and now I am an E-4. (O.C. - Robert is a Corporal in the Marines.) And I hope it helps me, like, get a job when I get out, yeah, I sure hope it does.

Robert addresses the powerful effect of the overarching language model in interpersonal relationships with authority figures and the repercussions from those interactions. Coupled with further ideological factors, it becomes transparent that students from the school identify with patterns of social integration that locks their behavior into accepted modes. The anger exhibited by Gina, as well as the calmer duplicity exhibited by Christy and Robert illustrate the perceived roles they adopted as students within the educational system. In other words, if certain students of particular cultures, (i.e., middle class to wealthy) were to accept the lifestyle portrayed by the prior three interviews, they would consider themselves failures; however, Gina, Christy, and Robert, do not consider the lifestyle they lead to be a failure. They consider it to be determined by who and what they are. Students of the lower socio-economic class have a language that defines failure differently. Therefore the language and ideology that defines failure in one culture does not necessarily do so in another. However, it is apparent, that consensual acceptance of the overarching paradigm entrenches these students into a lifestyle that their particular consciousness does not allow to be transcended. The counselor at the school explained that out of the class (27 graduates) from which Gina, Robert, and Christy graduated, only six went to four-year colleges (one of those had, however, dropped out). Nearly half, however, attended the nearby community college where the emphasis for each student is in one of several vocational areas.

An interview with one of the students who attended a four-year, expensive, private school provides interesting contrasts to the preceding interviews and lifestyles. Sandra is an attractive, gregarious woman. She had matured in a middle class family. Her

older brother had previously graduated from a private school and was now a stock broker in a well-known financial firm. Sandra's family, she stated in the interview "had an expectation of success. My dad would not have accepted anything less" (Int 1, p. 3). The language and ideology utilized by teachers and school officials toward Sandra facilitated the legitimization of the culture to which Sandra had conceptualized for herself. She explained:

> School was always good to me. It helped me to obtain what I needed to have to go on and be a success in life. My teachers were, for the most part, supportive. One teacher, Mrs. Smith was excellent. She, would like, always take the time to help me in whatever I needed. She was always challenging me to do my best. And I think she was the one who allowed me to believe in myself. You know, by just her being there, and making sure I was on the right...doing the right thing. In _____ (O.C. - Ms. Smith was/is the sponsor of a particularly active club at the school) I was elected as a state officer, and my Junior year we flew to Washington to participate in the national _____ convention. After we returned the principal asked me to speak at a Basketball Pep Rally about my trip, and about how we can all obtain success.

Sandra's active engagement in the schooling process differs significantly from several others in her class. Those who are actively engaged in school conceptualize, interpret, and give meaning much differently than do students, who, because of their socio-economic structured position are disengaged from the school process. The narrative that Sandra offers is filled with positive terminology. Conversely, Gina, Christy and Robert use fatalistic language that disallows the particular type success Sandra is enjoying.

Sandra also seemed to not have a clear image of those who do not succeed. She tended to believe that the students that do not do well, or were not successful later in life had no one to blame but themselves. Unequivocal in her opinion of people who were less than successful in society, Sandra quipped:

> Lots of people just don't want to learn. They do not want to be at school and they sure do not want to take advantage of all that is offered. I mean, sure, we are all born with different talents, but you still can make the most out of what you have...I guess all you have to look at is most of, uh, my classes in high school. You taught, you know what it is like. I mean all the guys in the back throwing spit wads and the girls talking...I mean I got into trouble once in a while too...I am no goody two shoes, but still, I, uh, sure know when to turn it on to study, or write a paper or whatever. Too many people want things, just you know, given to them. Sorry, but that's just not like it is. You make your own way to go, and if

> you ...well if you screw it up then you have got nobody to blame but yourself. I'm proud of what I have become and I did it because I worked hard and earned it. Other people can do that too.

Sandra tends to relate success with personal achievement, work, and perseverance, rather than any particular social structure. Indeed she denies the existence of social structures as a barrier to academic or personal success. Interestingly, those with less success do not seem to lay blame on social structures either. Rather than denunciate society for the structures that prevent success, they simply define failure away. The language that circumscribes their lives transcends success and failure causing new meaning. The boundaries of success are widened and the limits of failure diminished. The narratives of Jane, one of the graduates who entered a four year college, but later dropped out, illustrate the phenomenon more precisely.

Jane was born poor. Her mother had left she and her father while Jane was very young. Her father, worked part-time at a local garage, mowed lawns, and attempted to raise a few cattle on a small farm. Jane, as a high school student indicated that she was extremely unhappy:

> I was overweight in high school. I hated that. So I tended to over work and make good grades to try to be accepted in the "smart group." I, uh, well...I guess I was pretty good at getting the grades, but nobody ever really accepted me. I mean,... well my father and I lived in an old trailer, and it was always a mess and I couldn't ever bring anybody home there. I ... I, think I hated everything about school, even the parts I did well in. I did not to...I mean did not really try for me, it was all a fake, just to get in with the "in" group. The teachers always patronized me too, like, you know, look at Jane, she is doing so well, like why shouldn't I do well? Just because we were poor. But even though I was a so called success then, I really was not. I was the ultimate failure. Because I tried to please everyone else.

Jane redefined success and failure in her world by applying herself to her studies and performing well in school. The definition, however, was not her own. By applying the standard of the dominant paradigm, she conceptualized her success and/or failure by standards she could not live up too. Later in the interview, she described why she dropped out of college:

> It was really crazy. I mean my teachers in high school always acted like they were proud of me when, I, uh, did well, but now I think they just did that for their own egos. Look at what, Jane, the ... trained puppy did today, she finished

> her typing assignment. But at least I got some satisfaction in that. But at college, I don't know, I did not fit in anywhere. It was just a waste. No one cared about the poor white trash who had worked so hard to get there and you know, found out that I can't associate with this sorority or that group or just hang out with people. So I came back and I got a job and I get drunk on the weekends and I live my life. I think maybe that is all there is.

Jane's explanation concerning leaving college and redefinition of success and failure illustrates the decisions forced upon individuals by the dominant socio-economic class. Their language enforces the question of what it means to "be" into a practical, pragmatic paradigm. The dominant elitist class has no interest in a highly educated underclass, but prefer instead that the lower class would define the metaphysical question of "being" as well as definitions concerning success and failure in answers involving vocational ambitions and acceptance of "place." Jane illustrates that while she attenuated her "place" and coveted that which no one else desired, she could be allowed into the dominant paradigm. When, however, she began to transcend "place" and her definition of success reserved less domain, she became unable to transcend corporatism and its inherent boundaries.

The final set of narratives utilized to discuss the structural, corporate paradigm in education concern Maria. Maria was of Hispanic descent and faced much of the prejudice apparent in the school. She spoke English very well, unlike many of her fellow Hispanic students. Her father and mother worked in one of the chicken processing factories. Maria had not gone to college upon graduation, but instead worked at a local day care facility, whose patrons were Hispanic children. Maria had strong opinions concerning the school district:

> That school doesn't care anything about teaching the kids like me, as long as we work with chickens. That is all we know, or can know. That school doesn't even have ... (a) teacher of Espanola. They have a French teacher. They make no sense. There is only one ESL (English as Second Language) teacher for all of us kids that come here. And the school board won't hire no more because most of the... us can't vote...What I got from the school was to be quiet, do your work, don't make no trouble.

Maria provides examples concerning the prevalence corporatism through language within this school district. The Hispanic community in the area is constrained from other parts of society by education, lingual, and corporate barriers. The corporate chicken plants need a malleable, non-defiant Hispanic population in order to conduct

business. The school district complies with the needs of corporatism, because of the prejudice inherent in the system as well as the already predominant world-view of school as corporate model. The small amount of the dominant language understood by the Hispanic minority is antithetical to activist inclinations (Maria's "be quiet, do your work, make no trouble.")

Further, Maria notes education in the United States is more about socialization than learning curriculum - in English or Spanish.

The teachers did not think we could learn anything. I really think that most of those teachers really thought that nobody who could not speak English was just ignorant. It was like capturing sayings perfect was what was important. And the white students didn't, but they didn't get into trouble. A lot of the girls in class would say 'like' all the time but nobody said that was wrong. But let a Mexican kid say something wrong and we got corrected every time. What does that you about how Mexicans were looked at and how whites were?

The double standard in Maria's exemplar illustrates overarching attitudes in the school system. The classism inherent in the corporate paradigm is akin to racism here, however, race is only one of the primary variables that entrench people in the corporate state.

Corporate Model in Education

The purpose of education is a paradox that resides at the axis of the debate concerning education. The United States has witnessed an explosion of vocationally based educational principals during the last two decades. School-to-Work is simply the latest in a stream of corporate styles to enter into the educational system. Unfortunately the interests of the state all too often are synonymous with the interests of corporate capitalists. The state serves the interest of capital, thereby granting corporations apical status among any subjective plurality that might exist. A key component of corporate power has been the underlying belief that the welfare of Americans is dependent upon the profitability of corporate interest. The paradox is thus: since the belief exists that the well-being of the population depends upon business, and since business cannot be forced to invest or produce to serve the well-

being of the populace, the state must provide inducement to business in order to provide for the general welfare. This inducement allows business to structure the rhetoric, to predict the utility, to build the language, and to gain consent in order to control the populace. Therefore an appropriate education program under this model proposes that teachers of lower socio-economic class children should begin where the child is in terms of his/her own interests rather than form the distanced interests of an academic subject. Because the child's interests, already predetermined by corporate technocratic culture, will undoubtedly lie in a utilitarian framework concerning work, making a living, technology, and corporate routine, the interests of business are served.

Observations at the school provided innumerous examples of the corporate utility model. Teachers rationalized their subjects by insisting that they were important in the "real world." Conversely, students often ask, "What good is algebra (or history, or biology, or literature)? How will this subject help me to get a job?" Especially profound in this debate are the reactions to school by children of different classes. When asked a question concerning the aim of education, the responses were in dynamic opposition concerning outcome, yet similar concerning purpose. Sally, for example, matured in a large, middle class, religious farm family. She had, upon graduation, decided to attend a state school and major in accounting. Her opinion concerning the purpose of education is telling in scope:

> I believe that education has to be to support your family. I mean why else would you go to school unless it was to help you to make a living. My family always stressed the importance of education so that we could have a successful life afterward. I, guess, well, you could say that I am really happy with my education. It is going to help me to get a good job in business, and if I ever get married, we can have some of the things that everybody likes or wants.

Sally's materialistic mindset, i.e., education equals monetary gain, seems to be common among those students within the nurture of the middle class. Sally's argument as to the purpose of education is not unique from other classes. Noticeable, however, in lower classes are Sally's claims as to the positive outcomes of education. Students interviewed and observed in this study, who belonged to lower class backgrounds, while positing similar views concerning the purposes of education were not as positive in their responses to the outcomes of education. Gina notes:

> That school didn't do a thing for me. I never learned much at all that I didn't learn on my own. I really thought that schools were supposed to get people ready to get real jobs and make good money, but it really didn't help me very much. I don't think that if I woulda done more there it would've made a damn bit a difference either. All I woulda ever got was to work at _____. (O.C. - the chicken factory)

Gina's purpose for the educational process was similar to that of Sally, yet the attitudes toward outcome were much different. Lying at the crux of the polarization between outcomes may lie the expectation of the educational system toward children of different class. Customarily, little is expected from students of lower class. For example, during an observation period, one exchange between teachers in the faculty lounge dramatically illustrated the point. It seems two female students of in the Junior Class were pregnant. One was from a prominent family, the other was from a Hispanic family. One teacher expressed her opinion to the other, "You can never tell, can you? No one would ever expect for _____ to wind up in trouble. I expect as much from a lot of the Mexicans, though" (obs 2, field notebook, p. 6). That no surprise, no moral indignation was exhibited at the plight of the Hispanic student reinforces the thought that lack of expectation in outcome by instructors fortifies entrenchment of the lower class by the corporate paradigm.

When educators examine the processes concerning interlocking consensus aggregates, i.e., corporate influence, the school, the state, one of the most striking results is the compliance by the underclass in school toward power elites. Rather than question their plight, students most often acquiesce and become a participant in consensual corporate structure. Educational culture is intertwined with corporate influence and students of all classes fail to breach the walls that corporate structure constructs about them. Sandra, mentioned earlier as having matured in an upper middle class background, illustrates her (un)conscious innate ability to grasp the opportunities provided to her by class asserts:

> Sure, I know that I am lucky, but what am I supposed to do, throw it all away and go to Africa and join the Peace Corps. I don't think so. I mean, I give to charity, and it will be people like me who make money and give some to different organizations that really help people. I get really tired of the self-righteous attitudes of people who think it is a sin to use education as a way to make it big in the world... I would rather have one good business class that can teach me how to make it, than all the theorizing in the world about things you

> can't do anything about...I am proud of what I have accomplished in my education and the doors it is going to open for me.

Sandra has opted out of the formulation that sees the classroom as a site for political activity and struggle. These fundamental features of an education in a free society are only realized when the student becomes a political agent concerned with improving economic and social conditions in the larger society. She views the outcome of her education as positive (in that it begets material success). She is a product of the corporate school model; i.e., a member of the dominant elite either overseeing the major commodity (lower class labor) produced by the system or becoming, herself, enmeshed in the economic-technocratic paradigm guaranteed by corporate authoritarianism.

Conclusion

My own ideas of public school were impacted by this research. Although I had taught in the public school system for nearly 11 years, I was still ill-prepared for the depth of helplessness indicated by the participants in the study. I realized that although I knew the theoretical constructs associated with capitalistic corporatism, I was not ready to witness the praxis of what actually occurred to students who walked within these structures. Too actually view former students wallowing in a system that has destined them to class and place was and is difficult, indeed. And yes, this is a poor, rural, mid-western community. But I often wondered to myself, as I was conducting this study, if there were not tens of millions of other disenfranchised young adults facing the same structural challenges who did not live in poor, rural, mid-western communities. I suspect the answer is more disturbing than I can imagine.

I hope that the participants in this study have also been impacted by it. I have remained in contact with some and have been, I think, a positive influence. I offered some guidance but most of all, the process of telling the story has been uplifting for the participants.

Finally, pedagogy in the public school setting has all too often followed the example of the corporate model to the expense of democratic principles, freedom and critical scholarship. Ultimately, capitalistic corporatism will not only lead to, but help to sustain, rigid classism. Indeed, as Korten (2000) points out, inequity in income and

the unequal distribution of power and influence has been pandemic as capitalism expands throughout the world. This is apparent in the educational system. Vo-tech schools and curriculum have bloated in size and number across the nation, while humanities taught in the public schools has decreased in number and import. Rhetoric and philosophy are viewed as a by-product in education, while business and accounting are viewed as essential.

Ethical scholars and educators must realize the impact of their acquiescence in this pedagogical activity. Knowledge is not created in a vacuum. Value effects can and are far reaching as conducted in the classroom experience. The language of education should not be the harbinger of corporatism. Nor should just, free, and democratic principles that may gained through education be held hostage to utilitarianist attitudes. If critical scholars and educators desire to make an impact they must come to understand that they do not have a corporate outlet to display their wares. Critical educators' best hope is to take up the struggle within the classroom (Berlin, 1996). Instructional practices and textbooks have established corporate managerial bias. The call for critical intellectuals, teachers, university faculty, and theorists to become involved in education and student's development should be pervasive. The opportunity to break the chains of corporate constraint happens when symbolic violence in classrooms takes place. It happens when the outcome of education includes the bettering of the fate of the lower class. It happens when the student gains consciousness. It is, perhaps, the only opportunity.

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