

The Ideological Conditions of Social Reproduction

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Abstract

This paper investigates the interplay between economic-political and social-cultural theories of reproduction by highlighting the centrality of ideology as an instrument of reproduction. The paper explores how the dominant neoliberal ideology works, pedagogically, to produce and reproduce social inequalities and how schools and education systems play one of the most (if not the most) important roles in inculcating the dominant ideology and sustaining the system of domination. I invoke Louis Althusser's analysis of ideology and discuss the role of the educational apparatus, Bowles Gintis's "correspondence thesis" and Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron's social-cultural reproduction framework that provides a more complex, yet subtle account of inequality and transference of social stratification.

"Above all, we must fight against the power of the dominant neoliberal ideology that keeps on offending and attacking the human nature while reproducing itself socially and historically, threatening dreams, utopias and hopes."

Paulo Freire (1998)¹

¹Freire, Paulo (1998) "Message to the World Congress on Action Learning and Action Research" in ALAR , 3/1. This posthumous message by Paulo Freire was read by Jacques Boulet at *World Congress on Action Learning and Action Research* in Cartagena (Colombia), entitled "Convergence in Knowledge, Space and Time."

Introduction

The current global economic crisis has most certainly become one of the greatest assaults on global economic stability to have occurred in three-quarters of a century,² bringing the inexorable march of neoliberalism to an abrupt *pause*. But we must not rush to make funeral arrangements, just yet. “Neoliberalism is not *really* dead, it is just tuckered out” (Clemmons, 2008, para. 3) and continues its relentless reign as the dominant – if not insidiously hegemonic – highly pervasive, all encompassing global ideology that serves to engender, sustain and reproduce the rapacious capitalist order and its hedonistic consumer culture. As with all (dominant) ideologies, neoliberalism has become naturalized, legitimized, universalized and firmly embedded in everyday discourse, operating as a mechanism for upholding and reproducing the asymmetrical power relations in society that favour “the haves over the have-nots, men over women, the conventional over the dissenting, the dominant over the subordinate” (Hoffman, 2004, p. 91).

The ever expanding tentacles of this growing hydra have prodigiously metastasized³ and spread across the globe, permeating almost every “organ” of society under the guise of an illusory, yet highly seductive rhetoric that connotes “freedom,” “choice” and “consumer liberty,” while fiercely seeking to neutralize and destroy potential pockets of resistance to global corporate expansion and capital interests at the expense of the global and national working class (Hill & Kumar, 2008). Such rhetoric has been ever so effectively and strategically utilized to justify deregulation, privatization of state resources and the utter dismantling of the historically guaranteed welfare state, “defining profit-making as the essence of democracy and equating freedom with the unrestricted ability of markets to govern economic relations free of government regulation” (Aronowitz, 2003, p. 121). Neoliberalism recognizes no boundaries in its pursuit of new markets and blatantly and repeatedly violates its own commitment to individual freedoms and aspirations. It undermines democratic values, social justice, critical thought and social citizenship, while adhering to the ideology of global mono-economics that intends to remove state boundaries and weaken the rights of individuals and communities.

² “The Global Financial Crisis,” by Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd (February 17, 2009).

³ Neoliberalism signifies the metastatic stage of the planetary cancer (Kovel, 2008).

Neoliberal ideology has deeply saturated our very consciousness, toying with our emotions and muddling our instincts; capitalizing on our values and manipulating our desires with a seeming multitude of “endless choices” and possibilities inherent in the social world which we inhabit (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism is defended not as normatively superior to any alternatives, but as the *only* alternative insofar that the educational, economic and social world we see and interact with and the commonsense interpretations we put on it have become the “real world;” the only world we know (Hay, 2007; Apple, 2004). The propagation and enforcement of the seemingly omnipresent, omnipotent, inescapable ramifications of neoliberalism are irrefutable. But the strength of neoliberalism as an ideology lies not only in its ability to reproduce itself, *per se*, but rather in its capacity to adjust or mutate to the “underdetermined” evolution of its own policies and practices (Weiner, 2003). Indeed, the conditions of the domination of neoliberal ideology as an “ultra-right utopia⁴” are articulated in Pierre Bourdieu’s (1998) *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, whereby Bourdieu’s “resistance” against the neoliberal consensus is precisely encapsulated in the following statement: “Everywhere we hear [it] said, all day long – and this is what gives the dominant discourse its strength – that there is nothing to put forward in opposition to the neoliberal view” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 29). Neoliberalism, as such, has not only become a hegemonic mode of discourse, but has pervasively effected ways of thought and political-economic practices “to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way we interpret, live in and understand the world” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). In short, neoliberal ideology has presented itself as self-evident; as common-sense and simply as: “the way things are.”

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the interplay between economic-political and social-cultural theories of reproduction by highlighting the centrality of ideology as an instrument of reproduction. The paper will explore how the dominant ideology works, pedagogically, to produce and reproduce social inequalities and how schools and education systems play, perhaps, one of the most (if not *the* most) important roles in inculcating the dominant (neoliberal) ideology and sustaining the system of domination. I will first provide an outline of Louis Althusser’s (1971) analysis of ideology and discuss the role of the educational apparatus – as the

⁴Ljubiša Mitrović, 2005.

dominant ideological state apparatus in capitalist societies – that secures and sustains the ruling ideology. I will subsequently proceed to investigate Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis's (1986) highly influential – albeit broadly criticised for embodying an overly reductionistic and deterministic worldview – “correspondence thesis,” that not only extends and reinforces Althusser's conception of ideology, but that truly represents “a pivotal moment in critical studies of education and work in advanced capitalist societies” (Livingston, 1998, p. 198). Finally, I will turn to Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron's (1977) social-cultural reproduction framework that provides a more complex, yet subtle account of inequality and transference of social stratification by proposing that cultural elements – such as cultural capital – mediate the relationship between economic structures, schooling and students' lives (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

Althusser's critique of schools in his well known essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” bears great similarities to Bourdieu and Passeron's *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. And whilst Althusser and Bourdieu share a very similar materialistic view, “Bourdieu expresses a rather ambivalent relationship with Althusserianism” (Pilario, 2005, p. 115) and criticizes Althusserian Marxism for treating actors as simple adjuncts to structures, amongst other things (Swartz, 1997). Nevertheless, in attempting to, perhaps, conflate the theories of Bourdieu and Althusser vis-à-vis the role of education, we run the risk of overlooking the very real differences that separate the two (Lane, 2000). Althusser and Bourdieu have, undoubtedly, made a significant contribution to reproduction theory in a host of valuable and distinctive ways – some of which will be discussed further in the paper – and provide an invaluable lens through which to view and understand why schools, today, continue to reproduce inequalities despite the decades of seemingly ameliorative reforms.

While theories of social reproduction may, perhaps, proffer a basis for understanding *how* and *why* inequalities are reproduced, they do not necessarily provide any immediate solutions that could potentially help put an end to, or alleviate the reproduction and perpetuation of the vicious cycle of inequality that persists in schools. If these theories are to be of any importance, they must allow us to raise practical questions that will serve to guide educational policy action. Hence, in the conclusion, I will draw attention to theories of resistance – that go beyond the

structural determinism of reproduction theories – which may, indeed, provide a more optimistic outlook to the “one-sidedness” of reproduction theories and will potentially lead to the championing of viable alternatives that are in direct opposition to the attempts that depict neoliberal policies as natural and necessary (Heynen, 2007).

The Dominant Ideology

Dominant ideologies tend to work in favour of the capitalist interests and the powerful networks of corporate and political elites. It is this small cadre of the global economic power elites who sustain and support their dominance through the reproduction of knowledge that favours *their* interests; meanwhile, the subordinate classes appear to willingly accept their exploitation and oppression without necessarily considering themselves as being manipulated or coerced. Are we but mere prisoners trapped in a state of “false consciousness?” Furthermore, are we deluded into thinking that we can change or mold the conditions of our existence? This paper moves beyond the notion of ideology predicated on false consciousness and examines the ideological state apparatuses and the ways in which they operate in educational institutions to reproduce capitalist relations of production. Pierre Bourdieu argues that the social world does not merely operate through levels of consciousness, but through practices and mechanisms. Bourdieu urges us to “move away from the Cartesian philosophy of the Marxist tradition towards a different philosophy in which agents are not aiming consciously towards things, or mistakenly guided by false representation” (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992, p. 113). Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural reproduction and symbolic violence present an alternative to the misunderstandings and misuse of the concept of ideology (Cox & Brennan, n.d.).

In developed capitalist countries,⁵ power is predominantly exercised through a combination of coercion and consent⁶; through ideology rather than physical force (Fairclough, 1995, as cited in Burnes & Coffin). More specifically, ideologies are transmitted through or within social

⁵ Developing countries are often left with little or no choice but to follow in the footsteps of the industrial or developed countries by adopting policies that are gleaned from developed countries’ mainstream thinking. Governments in developing countries follow a largely neoliberal logic and are often found “locked into” neoliberal regimes such as the GATS (Hall, 2007). Others are “kicking away the ladder” to achieving development by adopting ideologies that suit their own economic needs (Makwana, 2006).

⁶ Consent through political legitimacy. For Gramsci, the dominant class becomes dominant through consent, though consent is always supported by force or coercion.

structures of civil society (hegemony) and are exercised within institutions like the family, church and schools, while “consent of the governed” (those who allow the hegemony to remain in power) is achieved through practices, meanings, values and identities that are taught and learned (Gramsci, 1971; Althusser, 1971; Fairclough, 1995). Hegemony is thus practiced and preached, materialized and propagated through educational systems (Apple, 1982) and schools are the vehicle through which attempts have been made to disseminate and reinforce the dominant ideology. Schools and higher education institutions, therefore, not only mirror and extend neoliberal principles like privatization, competition and the proliferation of the markets, but also seek to uphold, perpetuate and contribute to the reproduction of the dominant ideology. Education today has, essentially, been usurped by the institutionalization of neoliberal individualistic principles and by the neoliberal objectives of customer service, credentializing, technical training and instrumental learning (Hyslop-Margison & Naseem, 2008). Therefore, not only does education comply with neoliberal ideology, but moreover, educational institutions provide the perfect “breeding grounds” for the “reproduction” and inculcation of the dominant (neoliberal) ideology. underpinned

Theories of Social Reproduction

Theories of social reproduction are primarily concerned with *how* and *why* relationships of inequality and domination are reproduced through or within groups by providing conceptual models – like Bowles and Gintis’s economic-reproductive model and Bourdieu and Passeron’s cultural reproduction model –for investigating this process, particularly as it relates to education. While there is no single, comprehensive “theory of social reproduction, “*per se*, the process of reproduction in the analytical framework of political economy constitutes a fundamental problem that has been tackled in contemporary sociological theory, predominantly in the study of educational institutions (Kvasny, 2006). My purpose, therefore, is to present two conceptual models of social reproduction as a basis for understanding how the dominant neoliberal ideology, in fact, serves to reproduce, rather than to alleviate inequalities in schools. Theories of cultural and social reproduction have been concerned with the ways in which “innocent,” yet highly questionable pedagogical policies and practices like market-driven school choice policies, curriculum reforms, accountability reforms and student enrolment rules, contribute to the reproduction of forms of domination and inequality (Torres, 1995). The economic-reproductive

model, on the other hand, suggests that educational systems are homologous reflections of the workplace (Walker, 2003) and expose structural processes of schooling that are responsible for social and economic inequalities. By examining how schools perpetuate these systems of inequality, we may then posit “transformative pedagogies” or “pedagogies of resistance” – aimed at challenging coercive power relations and neoliberal educational agendas that increasingly subordinate education to the requirements of capital – and possibly work towards enabling the resourcefulness of historically underserved communities in meeting their self-determined needs (Kvasny, 2006).

Louis Althusser: *Ideological Apparatuses and Societal Reproduction*

Louis Althusser’s theory of reproduction (of the relations of production) is especially important because it opens the door to understanding the effects and significance of ideology and societal reproduction, which Althusser believes have been particularly under-theorised within the Marxist (German) tradition (Althusser, 2008). One of Althusser’s most significant contributions – as it pertains to this paper – is his analysis of education as one of the most important institutions by which the ruling class establish and maintain their hegemony and reproduce the conditions of capitalist production (Young & Whitty, 1977). For Althusser, the dominant, the most important Ideological State Apparatus in developed capitalist societies that has replaced in its function the church (the previously dominant Ideological State Apparatus), is the educational ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 2008). According to Althusser, “no other Ideological State Apparatus has the obligatory (and not least free) audience of the totality of the children of the social capitalist formation eight hours a day for five or six days out of seven” (Althusser, 2008, p. 30). As such, school systems – that are intimately involved in the process of sorting and selection – slot students neatly into a hierarchy that is a homologous reflection of the workplace so that by the time they reach the age of sixteen, students are “ejected into production” (Althusser, 2008). The “scholastically adapted” youth are then sent into positions of power and privilege (managers, business owners, professionals), while the vast majority, the “huge mass,” are sent into more exploited positions (labourers, minimum wage workers etc.) (Althusser, 2008). “Each mass ejected *en route* is practically provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfill of the exploited... the role of the agent of exploitation... of the agent of repression... or of the professional ideologist” (Althusser, 1971, as cited in Torres, 1995).

Althusser rejects the earlier Marxist⁷ notion that ideology functions to perpetuate a sense of “false consciousness” and argues that ideology is “profoundly unconscious” and thus invokes the Lacanian “subject” as the destination of all ideology (Belsey, 2002). Althusser analyzes ideology in terms of materialist concepts or “representations” such as “practices,” “rituals” and “apparatuses” (Žižek, 2003). By “representations,” Althusser is referring not to the ideas in one’s head, *per se*, but rather “implicit beliefs,” propositional schema that structure human practices that do not necessarily emerge at the level of consciousness (Žižek, 2003). In the words of Althusser, “ideology represents an imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, 2001) by transforming them into subjects. Hence, while subjects may see themselves as self-determining agents, they are but merely shaped by the ideological process. For Althusser, ideology is inculcated at an unconscious level and involves an eternal and inescapable structure of misrecognition. It is, therefore, ideology that constructs humans as subjects and not subjects that construct ideology.

Ideology “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it “recruits” subjects among the individuals, or “transforms” the individuals into subjects by that very precise operation which Althusser calls *interpellation* (Althusser, 2008). Within the imaginary sense, individuals see or hear themselves being addressed, interpellated, hailed – primarily through language by the dominant ideology – in ways that they may find flattering, or not. The individual may turn around believing or suspecting that the hailing was intended for her, putting her in a position whereby she feels to be “unique.” Most people when hailed, within hearing distance, will immediately assume that they are the ones being summoned, even if they have done nothing to warrant the summon. The individual’s reaction merely positions the individual as a subject. It is through this process of interpellation that individuals submit, unconsciously, to the dominant ideology, while they come to construe their relation to the world as “natural.” This subconsciously located objectification encourages people to see themselves as fully autonomous or as self-determining agents, while suppressing their awareness that their lives are actually being determined by other forces – like economic or political forces – that function beyond their control. In sum, ideology is constituted by the dominant beliefs, values and practices which serve a political or economic function and

⁷ It is important to note that Marx, himself, never used the phrase “false consciousness” and that it originated from Friedrich Engels (as cited in Barrett, 1991).

work through state institutions, like schools, to interpellate or construct individuals into particular subject positions (Bravo, Murray, Robertson, & Tunzelman, n.d).

Society functions, as such, to maintain conditions favourable to the accumulation of capital and ideology functions in ways that help perpetuate these conditions. For Althusser, societies are thought of as a multi-layered complex of interrelated structures in which the form of each is affected by the action of all the others (Hughes, Sharrock & Martin, 2003); in other words, they are “over-determined” (combined of different, often opposed forces but not necessarily in the over-simplified sense of these forces being merely contradictory elements). The economic base (mode of production) refers to sites of production (cultural productions like art, music, religion, etc.), while the superstructure consists of the political and legal systems. The base and superstructure are related to each other in definite ways, while the ideological structure – which refers to institutions such as churches and schools that perpetuate dominant beliefs and values – is not a mere expression of the economic base, it essentially determines which element is to be dominant in a social formation because of the effects it has upon both structures and the dynamic of society. Although culture (the economic base) and politics (the superstructure) are independent (relatively autonomous) of each other, they still share the ideological interconnections which serve to perpetuate the capitalist system (Bravo, Murray, Robertson, & Tunzelman, n.d).

Although Althusser does not necessarily reject the Marxist model of base/superstructure, he does, more or less, emphasize how ideology is more pervasive and more “material” than previously acknowledged in the Marxist tradition and thus seeks out to distinguish “Ideological State Apparatuses” (ISAs) from the “Repressive State Apparatus” (RSA). The ISA, of which schools are a part, maintains ideological hegemony for the ruling class. Althusser believes that: “the Ideological State Apparatus, which has been installed in the *dominant* position in mature capitalist social formations... is the *educational ideological apparatus*” (Althusser, 2008, p. 26) and argues that: “The mechanisms which produce this vital result for the capitalist regime are naturally covered up and concealed by a universally reigning ideology of the School, universally reigning because it is one of the essential forms of the ruling bourgeois ideology: an ideology which represents the School as a neutral environment purged of ideology ...”

(Althusser, 2008, p. 30). In short, schools are an instrument of bourgeois hegemony and are presented as a universally neutral and natural mechanism (Au, 2006). Ideology, then, contributes to the ongoing reproduction of the existing social conditions of production by inculcating every child with the ruling ideology and this is done through education: “it is in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of the skills of labour power” (Althusser, 2008, p. 7). But the capitalist education system does not simply reproduce labour power and its diversified skills, it also, at the same time, reproduces its submission to the rules of the established order, “i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression” (Althusser, 2008, p. 6-7). Hence the subject/student comes into being only on the basis of a massive.

Althusser’s conception of ideology and how it is reproduced to uphold the prevailing system of social domination has been highly influential, albeit, not free from criticism. Althusser does not particularly take note of other forces of domination and power, such as those derived from gender, race, and ethnic relations. Thus, the class reductionism implicit in his approach does not necessarily account for how the intersection of these relations (of gender, race and ethnicity) with class, structure or shape ideology (Puehretmayer, 2001, as cited in Walker, 2003). Althusser also makes no direct mention of the importance of student/teacher relations or what actually takes place within classrooms and schools. Moreover, Althusser does not make clear the ways in which knowledge is produced and how it becomes transmitted, constructed and legitimized, which is crucial to understanding the contexts and conditions of schooling. Lastly, Althusser fails to explain how resistance can emerge from the influences of the State Apparatus. Mainly, Althusser’s analysis of interpellation appears to be rather deterministic in that it fails to recognize human agency and the possibility of resistance. Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction, on the other hand, attempts to reconcile such difficulties by attempting to recognize the subject within objective structures and reconciles structuralism with agency. But before looking at Bourdieu and Passeron’s social-cultural theory of reproduction, I will examine the ways in which Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis expand upon Althusser’s ideology through their “correspondence principle.”

Public Education: *The Unequal Equalizer*

The long held notion of public education as the “great equalizer” and the most powerful instrument of social mobility that will bridge the chasm of opportunity that divides underprivileged children from children from more affluent backgrounds, has apparently, turned out to be nothing more than an enduring myth, riddled with false assumptions, inconsistencies and half truths. Rather than serving as “great equalizers,” educational institutions play a key role in reproducing inequalities. The growing disparities among children are not necessarily being addressed through the opportunities offered by public schools, as the “mythology” would have us believe. And while we may argue that education certainly facilitates opportunities for “upward” social and occupational mobility or that education may, so to speak, provide “the oil that lubricates upward mobility,” evidence suggests⁸ – at least for the vast majority of students – that public education simply reinforces the status quo by reproducing the existing hierarchy of social and economic relationships (Finn, 2007).

Stimulated by raging academic debates and social conflicts about the structure and purposes of education in the late 1960s (Bowles & Gintis, 2002), American economist Samuel Bowles and professor of economics Herbert Gintis de-mythicized the ideal of public education as “the great equalizer” among disparate social classes in the United States in their popularly read book *Schooling in Capitalist America*. Bowles and Gintis and Althusser agree that schools function as such to reproduce the labour power necessary for capital accumulation. While Althusser uses the concept of ideology to explain the role schools play in securing the domination of the working class, Bowles and Gintis employ a different theoretical vehicle through the notion of the “correspondence principle.”

By adopting a traditional ontological perspective, central to the Marxist tradition, the economists propose through the “correspondence principle” – that postulates a systematic parallel or a homology between features of the school and workplace (Small, 2005) – that schools not only contribute to the maintenance of the capitalist system, but that ideological inculcation of social relations are learned in schools, which essentially, correspond to the social relations of

⁸Numerous studies, research, empirical evidence and very powerful opinions suggest that public schools not only perpetuate the status quo of society, but they are proficient at implementing and maintaining practices that serve that purpose (Kozol, 2005; Oakes, 1985).

production (Torres & Antikainen, 2002). In other words, public schooling reproduces and perpetuates social divisions and class-based inequalities, while the social relations that take place within schools, like the hierarchical division of labour that exists between teachers and students, the alienated nature of student school work itself and the relentless competition that exists among students (Lynch, 1989), prepares students to accept their role in the hierarchical structure and to better meet the demands of the occupations they are more likely to pursue. Bowles and Gintis further purport that intergenerational transmission of social class and economic privilege is accomplished through unequal educational opportunities (Walker, 2003). Although social class, gender and race play an important role in determining students' social experiences, correspondence theorists reify class location which, in a sense, overshadows other important socially structured relationships such as those associated with race and gender, "although both race and gender have been found to be theoretically relevant to the trajectory of experience of concrete groups within and outside the educational systems" (Walker, 2003, p. 7).

By drawing on the Marxist base/superstructure model, Bowles and Gintis analyze schools as institutional constructs that operate on a superstructure level. The concepts of "base" and "superstructure" form a metaphor that is central to Marxist theory, particularly as it relates to ideology and the role of schools in producing and reproducing the dominant ideology. Furthermore, the relationship between "base" and "superstructure" and the question of ideology are of key importance in Bowles and Gintis's formulation of the "correspondence thesis," which maintains that schools function to serve the needs of capitalist production (Au, 2008). It is important to clarify, nonetheless, that Karl Marx uses the metaphor of "base" (the mode of production), not only in reference to the economic base in society, which determines social formations, but also to the forms of the state and social consciousness; how people relate to each other in the production of their lives and means of life encompassing all social and ideological structures such as politics, education, religion, or art. The superstructure refers to a state, a legal system and the social institutions through which ideas arise on this base. These elements make up what is referred to as the superstructure, which reflects, protects, organizes and strengthens the base.

Bowles and Gintis's "correspondence principle" is often regarded as "too mechanical" and "overly economic" and thus, has been subject to critical scrutiny as it tends to ignore the role of teachers, culture and ideology in schools and neglects students' and others' resistance to dominant social relations (as cited in Au, 2008). Moreover, structuralist theories offered by Marxists and neo-Marxists are often criticized for being too "crudely deterministic" to capture the complexity of social reproduction because they regard individuals as "effects" or mere "subjects" of a social structure (subjects who are, consequently, "subject" to the structures of society). As such, Bowles and Gintis's arguments lack cultural analysis and overlook the crucial notion of student agency or resistance. It is, therefore, assumed in such perspectives that human agents are passive role bearers who are shaped by demands of capital (Giroux, 1984). Although Pierre Bourdieu's conception of an "homologous" relationship between economy and culture may be somewhat reminiscent of Bowles and Gintis's "correspondence principle" (Henry, Knight, Lingard, & Taylor, 2004), Bourdieu and Passeron certainly provide a deeper theoretical analysis of how cultural reproduction functions within schools in their homonymous book *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*.

Theories of Cultural Reproduction: *Bourdieu and Passeron*

While Bowles and Gintis focus particularly on how the social dynamics of school life "correspond" to the reproduction of the hierarchical demands of the workplace, they have failed to develop a theory of consciousness and culture. Hence, theories of cultural reproduction begin precisely where social-economic reproduction theories end (Giroux, 2001). Aside from being concerned with how capitalist societies reproduce themselves, cultural reproduction theories develop a sociology of schooling that links culture, class and domination (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). More specifically, theories of cultural reproduction analyze the principles that underlie the structure and transmission of the cultural field of schools and question how school culture is produced, selected and legitimized (Giroux, 2001). While correspondence theories place a greater emphasis on economic capital, theories of cultural reproduction privilege symbolic capital in the form of cultural and social capital (Walker, 2003). Bourdieu and Passeron affirm that while economic capital is a dominant principle of domination within capitalist society, Bourdieu takes it a step further and argues that even exchanges of economic capital have a symbolic significance. Therefore, their theory of cultural reproduction advances the

understanding that domination is not only a reflection of economic power but is, rather, constituted by a more subtle power (symbolic power), imposed by the ruling class; that power is consistent and in favour of the ruling class's interests or ideology (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

The epistemological launching point for cultural and social reproduction theories is the tendency for societies to reproduce themselves. Bourdieu and Passeron maintain that although societies claim to recognize that individuals are equals in right, the educational system only contributes to disguise, and thus, legitimize, in more subtle ways, the arbitrariness of the distribution of powers and privileges, that are perpetuated through the socially uneven allocation of school titles and degrees (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). According to Bourdieu and Passeron's cultural reproduction model, the education system does not necessarily mirror the structure of the labour market; it is the cultural events and processes – which essentially predate the education system – that have a fairly influential impact on the education system. The dominant classes exercise symbolic violence by imbuing their cultural arbitrariness on the dominated classes “contributing, thereby, to the reproduction of the structure of power relations within a social formation in which the dominant system of education tends to secure monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p. 6). Bourdieu and Passeron state that the educational system is a very important agent when it comes to exercising symbolic violence and functions, as such, to legitimize the dominant power structures:

“Every institutionalized educational system (*ES*) owes the specific characteristics of its structure and functioning to the fact that, by the means proper to the institution, it has to produce and reproduce the institutional conditions whose existence and persistence (self-reproduction of the system) are necessary both to the exercise of its essential function of inculcation and to the fulfilment of its function of reproducing a cultural arbitrary which it does not produce (cultural reproduction), the reproduction of which contributes to the reproduction of the relations between the groups or classes (social reproduction)” (Bourdieu & Passeron, p. 54, 1984).

By ingraining or legitimising the existing social structures, which are objectively recognized as legitimate authority, dominant classes are able to uphold power and control, while subordinated groups remain disempowered (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu and Passeron further

purport that the arbitrariness and illegitimacy of the dominant culture is misrecognized (only to be recognized as a legitimate authority), both by subordinated groups and schools (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 13). The dominant culture (that which reinforces the arbitrary power) uses cultural capital in a covert way to inculcate their arbitrary truths and thus replicate the existing social structures. It is the imposition and legitimating of these very systems that reinforces the arbitrary power of symbolic violence and schools inculcate cultural and social reproduction by granting legitimacy and universality to the arbitrary cultures of the dominant group (Walker, 2003). Educational institutions and schools uncritically and unabashedly accept the cultural codes of the dominant classes, assuming, of course that students from these classes enter schools receptive to learning, while viewing students from dominated classes as possessing habitus inimical to learning (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). Unlike, correspondence theorists, who postulate educational systems as being over determined by the economy and the state, cultural theorists tends to posit a dialectical relationship between these systems and social class mediated by habitus (as cited in Walker, 2003).

This brings us to, perhaps, the most important contribution to cultural reproduction theory, which is none other than Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. The habitus, or the system of durable, transposable dispositions that influence practice congruent with the structural principles of the social world, is fundamental to the reproductive process (as cited in Walker, 2003). It is through the inculcation of these dispositions by the family, educational system and social class, that the imposition of ideologies and the fluid operation of social life are able to occur (Shirley, 1986, as cited in Walker, 2003). Thus, if a social structure is characterized by inequalities amongst groups, the dominant groups, who are also the privileged groups, will seek to perpetuate their privilege by drawing upon their cultural and social capital, which is much greater than that possessed by underprivileged groups (Shirley, 1986, as cited in Walker, 2003). As a consequence, dominant classes are able to exercise symbolic violence by transforming their cultural arbitrariness into universal forms of meaning (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Of course, cultural reproduction theories are not free from criticism, primarily since they fail to address the intricacy of individual agency. Moreover, they tend to ignore the ideological and cultural spaces that make resistance and/or change – that can be carried out by individuals or groups within systems – possible. Indeed, the obfuscation of individual choice and a theory of social action

render cultural reproduction theories problematic in that they fall short of providing any convincing explanation of how individuals, socially positioned with the same habitus, may develop personal trajectories that are dissimilar (Walker, 2003).

Bourdieu believes that schools do not mirror the dominant culture, but are relatively autonomous institutions that are influenced both directly and indirectly by other powerful institutions (Stanley, 1992). Furthermore, schools do not necessarily directly impose the dominant order but function as one part of a wider group or symbolic social institutions (Stanley, 1992). While the process of social reproduction is in fact very real, it is subtle. In his revisionist approach to the Marxist distinction between infrastructure and superstructure, Althusser theorizes that in certain historical situations, superstructural instances such as culture, ideology, religion and politics, can obtain relative autonomy from infrastructure and play an important role in shaping class relations (Swartz, 1997). But in the end, the economy is always determinative. Bourdieu on the other hand criticizes Althusserian Marxism because it treats actors as simple adjuncts to structures (or structural accessories), because it regulates culture to a highly formalized subsystem of superstructure and lastly, because it discourages actual empirical investigation (Swartz, 1997)

But what is the relationship between education and economic and cultural reproduction?

Michael Apple (1982) purports that the relationship is one confronting anyone who attempts to unpack the complex ties that connect economics and culture together (Apple, 1982). Because society is a complex and contradictory whole within which dominant institutions serve to reproduce the basic form of social order, reproduction would require extensive changes in society and culture that may involve a series of major reforms (Morrow & Torres, 2003).

Histories of education typically present the celebratory history of policy making as a “progressive process” based on reforms, but reforms often conceal ongoing social problems and dominant interests (Morrow & Torres, 2003). The ideological “package” of educational reforms that swept over the Alberta educational landscape in the mid 90s was certainly driven by top-down policies. Under neoliberalism, these reforms were aimed at overriding the promotion of educational equity and opportunity.

Neoliberalism and Free-Market Reforms

Neoliberal or neo-conservative political ideologies have flourished within the context of school reforms (charter schools, vouchers, school choice etc.). Many of these reforms are nothing less than blatant manifestations of the influence of neoliberal capital that dictates the principal aims of education serving, merely, to protect the status quo and galvanize the ongoing injustices that doggedly persist within our education systems. The implications of such reforms, as a series of ongoing (experimental) projects have been rooted in the systematic failure to provide educational equity and equality and have been devised, merely, to uphold and further perpetuate the capitalist order, while operating under the guise of “pro-active change” (Schugurensky, 1976) and a blurred vision of school improvement.

The general acceptance of neoliberalism as “common sense” has, essentially, legitimized and normalized the opening of all public sectors to trade⁹ and market competition. The political right has coaxed us into considering – at least within the last thirty years – that there has been a qualitative shift in the nature of the global economic order. Neoliberal global capitalism has been presented as “natural;” as the *only* realistic means of attaining social wellbeing and prosperity for all (as cited in Hill, 2008). In fact, the “New Right¹⁰” rhetoric – that education should play a more active role in the regeneration of the economy to meet the changing demands of the labour market – has, ultimately, been concerned with restructuring and redirecting education that will allow schools and universities maximum flexibility to compete with one another. Within the “New Right” ideology, educational provision is thought of in the same way as a commercial business and schools have become subject to market demands through which they aim to provide better “services” of a particular standard to their “clients.” And of course, “better” services are usually provided to clients who carry “bigger” wallets. Such demands have come to heavily influence every sphere of educational planning and reform (Leicester, Modgil & Modgil, 2000).

⁹ Education remains one of the least committed sectors to the GATS (General Agreement on Trades and Services) and pressure is mounting to change this. The U.S. has identified the liberalization of education services as one of its top four priorities in the current round and has called for the removal of obstacles to international trade that American officials say prevent foreign institutions from operating in other countries.

¹⁰Influenced by the work of economist and philosopher Friedrich Hayek (classical liberalism and free market capitalism against socialism and collectivist thought), Margaret Thatcher (TINA “there is no alternative” to the status quo of their economic system and neoliberalism) and Ronald Reagan implemented their (conservative) ideas of unfettered free markets, deregulation, dismantling of the welfare state, privatization, lower taxes and less state involvement in the economy, and restructuring of the national workforce in order to increase industrial and economic flexibility in an increasingly global market. They were also responsible for the redirecting in school policy.

The Tory governments of the richest provinces, Ontario and Alberta, under the populist leadership of Premiers Mike Harris and Ralph Klein, respectively (Albo, 2002), had fallen under the spell of neoliberalism. In fact, Alberta constitutes a prime example of neoliberal ideology personified. The penetration of market logic into the school systems has led to a series of educational reforms in the province of Alberta that were specifically targeted at increasing the competitiveness of schools so that they could “catch up” with the radical economic competition across the globe and to improve equality in “access” to education. But instead of providing greater access, reforms of standardized testing, accountability, school choice and self-management are felt to be more exclusionary and more so concerned with global economic competitiveness rather than educational equity and equality (Scoppio, 2002). And while many of these reforms were expected to restore the economy and reduce deficits in the federal budget and foreign trade (Fujita, 2000), it is certainly arguable whether or not these reforms were, actually, designed with student equity and/or equality in mind. Are schools, then, determined by the economy? In the case of the Alberta, the school reforms that took place in the mid 90s, in many ways, were precisely mirroring the economy of the time and continue to do so today.

To make education more “efficient,” schools and universities have been forced to adopt market models of education, thus moving away from the traditional concept of education as a publicly provided social good. This process has not only exacerbated – rather than ameliorated oppression and powerlessness – but has further reinforced the reproduction of class inequalities. The pursuit of “excellence,” along with promoting the deregulation and marketization of education, were set as twin objectives of reforms which advocated “choice.” These objectives gave more control to market mechanisms and local authorities and were characterized by neo-conservative and neo-liberal orientations (Fujita, 2000). And while advocates of market-based reforms may claim that such reforms have managed to enhance efficiency, responsiveness, diversity and choice (and even this remains highly questionable), at the end of the day, education systems operate as such to ensure that inequalities are constantly being reproduced.

Conclusion: *Contesting Neoliberal Education*

Theories of social reproduction have been heavily criticized for their deterministic characteristics. Most often related to structuralist Marxism – particularly manifest in the

correspondence principle where there is an underlying “structuralist link” (isomorphism) between economic and educational structures (Torres & Mitchell, 1998) – reproduction theories tend to overlook the significance of relative autonomy at the cultural level and the human experience of domination and resistance (McLeod, 1995), while – as previously noted – cultural reproduction theories are inherently problematic because they fail to address the intricacy of individual agency but also because they tend to favour Neo Marxist orientations that privilege class structures as determinants of life. Henry Giroux (1983) proposes that there is a need to thoroughly examine ideology, consciousness and culture in order to move reproduction theory past the theoretical impasses imposed by the structure-agency dualism (Giroux, 1983, as cited in McLeod, 2008) and perhaps adopt more “activistic” approaches. Theories of resistance, as seen in Paul Willis’s (1981) famous ethnographic study of British lads in *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, certainly draw attention to how students resist school authority and hegemonic practices through conflict. And while theories of resistance have their fair share of inherent problems, perhaps the “constraint principle” of reproduction may be supplemented by another principle of possibility that outlines theories of resistance (Gallagher, 1992). But before we can move to “the principles of possibility,” it is important to examine the “asymmetrical relations of power,” which are implied by both reproduction and resistance theories (Gallagher, 1992).

Resistance is a refreshing, optimistic response to the current education system (that is imbued with neoliberal rationality). Resistance does not necessarily imply all forms of oppositional behaviour, nor do violations of school rules constitute an act of resistance, unless it is committed by a student or students who, for example, see through the school’s achievement ideology and therefore act on that basis. Resistance calls for struggle against, rather than submission to domination (MacLeod, 2008). Furthermore, resistance theorists in education urge educators to evaluate the moral and political potential of opposition in schools (Abowitz, 2000); they are perhaps, tools for helping us understand and intervene within structures of power by pointing to the possibility of intervening into those educational contexts where reality is being continually transformed into power (Giroux, 2001). Resistance calls upon the examination of oppositional acts of students in school settings as moral and political expressions of oppression that will, perhaps, deepen our understanding of relative autonomy.

Without necessarily trying to romanticize the idea of resistance, it may, perhaps, allow us to evaluate nonconformity and offer strategies against the “common sense” “forced normality” of neoliberalism. Neoliberal policies in education have been detrimental, while the changes in recent years in education policy have severely damaged public institutions, particularly, schools and universities. It is important to underscore the urgency for strategies of resistance or resistance campaigns against neoliberal organizing in education. Some strategies already taking place today include global resistance movements against the GATS; campaigns for teacher education reform built on a radical Left/Green agenda; the adoption of pedagogical practices that foster collaboration; education action zones and private sector involvement in schooling; anti-racism and free speech movements in the US (Cooper, n.d.) and many, many more social movements and strategies that are organized locally, nationally and globally that are working to resist the further damage of neoliberal capitalism.

Might we see the end of the pernicious ideological wave of neoliberal capitalism and a dawn of a new democratic age? Many have predicted the decline of neoliberalism, while the current economic crisis has certainly exposed the emptiness of neoliberal rhetoric and the “evils of neoliberal voodoo economics” (Giroux & Giroux, 2009). The economic crisis has, certainly, struck a tremendous blow to the neoliberal “consciousness” exposing its frailty, while the ideologues of capitalism are scrambling around trying to pick up the pieces and put them back together again. Clearly, we are on the cusp of a paradigm shift, though I am not entirely convinced that the economic crisis has signalled the end for the neoliberal era, nor has it killed neoliberalism as a political project. Neoliberalism continues to reproduce the conditions for unleashing the most brutalizing forces of capitalism (Giroux, 2004) simply because it mutates in order to sustain itself as a political project. In other words, rather than collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions, it is “learning” from its own mistakes (Peck & Tickell, 2002). Perhaps David Harvey is right; perhaps we must now redefine and rethink neoliberalism, for it is not a moment of triumphalism (quite yet), but a moment of problematizing (Harvey, 2009).

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