

**A Labor Approach to the Development of the Self
or "Modern Personality:"
The Case of Public Education**

by

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Abstract

Karl Mannheim, and Karl Marx suggested that there is a relationship between economic and political institutions and that behaviors and attitudes are influenced by this. Viewing this postulate as a conception which posits the economic mode of production as the locus of causality for culture, this examination of capitalism as culture, investigates how education and its pedagogical techniques, as a means of "enculturation," reflects the capitalist economic mode of production. Building on the theoretical notions in the Sociology of knowledge and Structuralism, this hermeneutical analysis discusses how pedagogical techniques and curriculum arrangements of public schools in capitalist societies correlate with the organization of labor (for it is that role of the self which is dominant in capitalist societies). Data for this research was gathered through the content analysis of pedagogical techniques and curriculum arrangements adopted by The School Board of Broward County, Florida. Results show that the current shift in the organization of labor (from industrial to post-industrial) parallels, and therefore correlates with, the shift in curriculum and pedagogical arrangements of The School Board of Broward County, Florida; as such, it is a legitimate claim to suggest that the socialization of the self is determined by its relation to the mode of production.

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Figure 1

Chart of Shifts in Practice to Help Students Demonstrate Understanding

SHIFTS IN PRACTICE TO HELP STUDENTS DEMONSTRATE UNDERSTANDING

DESCRIPTION OF INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE	
Less	More
Whole class, teacher-directed.	Experiential, hands-on.
Worksheets, seatwork.	Active learning.
Transmission of information.	Demonstration, coaching, mentoring.
Coverage of curriculum.	Deep study of a few topics.
Textbooks and basal readers.	Real texts, primary sources.
Rote memorization of facts.	Higher-order thinking.
Tracking and leveling.	Heterogeneously grouped classes.
Reliance on standardized measures.	Reliance on teacher descriptions.

Source: Adapted from Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998.

Figure 2

Chart of Shifts in Curriculum Arrangements and Their Correlation to the Shift in the Organization of Work from Industrial to Postindustrial Capitalism

SHIFTS IN CURRICULUM ARRANGEMENTS AND THEIR CORRELATION TO THE SHIFT IN THE ORGANIZATION OF WORK FROM INDUSTRIAL TO POSTINDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM

DESCRIPTION OF WORK AND CURRICULUM PRACTICES			
WORK (INDUSTRIALISM)	CURRICULUM	WORK (POSTINDUSTRIALISM)	CURRICULUM
One-roof workhouses, management-directed.	Whole class, teacher-directed.	ethos of work which emphasizes experience.	Experiential, hands-on.
Stations-oriented work.	Worksheets, seatwork.	Teamwork/Interaction between workers.	Active and cooperative learning.
Transmission of information from management.	Transmission of Information.	Good listener and cooperative worker, mentoring with new workers, soft skills.	Demonstration, coaching, mentoring.
Specialization of work.	Coverage of Curriculum.	Specialization not required, interchangeable worker	Deep study of a few topics.
Careful study of workers manual to operate factory machinery.	Textbooks and basal readers.	Face to face interaction with consumers.	Real texts, primary sources.
Passive submission to schedules or routine.	Rote memorization of facts.	Flexibility or adaptability to circumstances.	Higher-order thinking.
Tracking and leveling of workers.	Tracking and leveling.	cultural-sensitivity to others.	Heterogeneously grouped classes.
Standardized measures to evaluate workers.	Reliance on standardized measures.	Reliance on management descriptions and teamwork.	Reliance on teacher descriptions.

I

Introduction

Max Weber, Karl Mannheim, and Karl Marx in their analytical conceptions of the nature of society supposes that there is a correlation between the economic structure of a society and its legal and political organization, and that even the world of our thought is affected by these relationships. Most conspicuously, Mannheim and Marx considered political, legal, philosophical, religious, and other ideas in their relationship with economic and social changes (Zeitlin, 1990). In fact, Marx's contention that the mode of production determines social, political, and intellectual processes in general is a striking and portentous one given the similarity between educational pedagogy and the organization of labor under the capitalist mode of production to name one example.

It can no longer be denied that the economic life of society is an important and pervasive influence, but these theorists, Marx especially, intended to say more than this; the essential features of intellectual life are the necessary products of economic institutions, and they require those institutions for their existence. Another way to put it: The mode of production (together with a host of more or less constant factors) constitutes the necessary condition and the sufficient

condition for every significant element of the intellectual superstructure (Runkle, 1968;502). In capitalist societies, for example, the forces of production are such as to bring about a division of labor. “The great division of labor has been made between the physical and the intellectual, writers, scientists, and philosophers would have to fall in the latter category. This is, of course, the same category in which the bourgeoisie place themselves. The mass of men in a capitalist state have been placed, more unmistakably than at any time in history, in the former category” (Runkle, 1968;494). At any rate, the specific form this tendency to division of labor takes is, of course, determined by society’s mode of production, and in capitalism, as previously mentioned, the accumulation of capital gives rise to distinctive social classes divided between those who accumulate capital and those who work for those who accumulate capital. In this relationship, the capitalist class or dominant class attempts to preserve the mode of production in order to preserve their own interest. Hence, the ideological superstructure contains religions sanctifying their ideals, moralities celebrating their virtues, artistic productions dramatizing their values, philosophies rationalizing their concepts, and sciences serving their needs; laws governing not only property but marriage and a host of other things are established to protect their economic interests (Runkle, 1968;483). And education itself, with the rise of the

modern state, is the means by which the members of the dominant class impose their will (without force) throughout society. That is, the educational curriculum will be that which the economic base, as perceived by the capitalists, of the capitalist society requires; thus education, in a sense, becomes the primary means of “enculturation” to the capitalist way of life. By controlling the material resources that sustain institutions, education in this case, the powerful can deny resources needed to make vital identity claims and to experience selves as agents (Schwalbe, 1993;342). “Selves are thus stunted as they are disciplined and harnessed to serve the needs of capital” (Schwalbe, 1993; 342-343).

The theoretical suggestion here, which builds on the ideas of Marx and Mannheim, is that the organization of work or labor under capitalism is the locus of causality for the ideological structure of educational pedagogy and curriculum, and also, the *raison d’etre* for the formation of self-identity. “The educational system, an institutionalized classifier which is itself an objectified system of classification reproducing the hierarchies of the social world in a transformed form, with its cleavages by ‘level’ corresponding to social strata and its divisions into specialities and disciplines which reflect social divisions ad infinitum, such as the opposition between theory and practice, conception and execution, transforms social classifications into academic classifi-

cations, with every appearance of neutrality, and establishes hierarchies which are not experienced as purely technical, and therefore partial and one-sided, but as total hierarchies, grounded in nature, so that social value comes to be identified with 'personal' value, scholastic dignities with human dignity. The 'culture' which an educational qualification is presumed to guarantee is one of the basic components in the dominant definition of the accomplished man, so that privation is perceived as an intrinsic handicap, diminishing a person's identity and human dignity, condemning him to silence in all official situations, when he has to 'appear in public,' present himself before others, with his body, his manners and his language. . . . Misrecognition of the social determinants of the educational career---and therefore of the social trajectory it helps to determine---gives the educational certificate the value of a natural right and makes the educational system one of the fundamental agencies of the maintenance of the social order. It is no doubt in the area of education and culture that the members of the dominated classes have least chance of discovering their objective interest and of producing and imposing the problematic most consistent with their interests" (Bourdieu, 1984;387-390). Awareness of the economic determinant of the development of the self through the arrangements of educational pedagogies and curriculums that pattern the organization of labor is the first step in decon-

structuring the legitimacy that the dominated, the workers of the hierarchical relationship inherent in capitalism, themselves grant to the system “from a confused perception that it is based on the opposition between ‘education’ and ignorance” (Bourdieu, 1984;390).

The Labor Approach

Essentially, both capitalism and public education are modern phenomena, and their correlation (that is the correlation between capitalism and education as a medium of enculturation), as such, begins with this so called age of modernity, which scholars mark as the age (1500 to the present) which witnessed capitalism’s historical development from its European origin to its present-day global dispersion under the umbrella of American liberalism. At present, what one sees from the development of this historical correlation, alas Marx’s and Mannheim’s postulates, is the capitalist control of public education as a medium of “enculturation” to the capitalist way of life; and along with the intermediaries of the great, mostly American-based transnational or multinational corporations, become a tool or mechanism of socialization in which “a standard form of American material life, along with Northamerican values and cultural forms, is being systematically transmitted to other cultures. Nor is this simply a matter of machinery and buildings, which increasingly make all the

places of the world look alike. It is not only a matter of values either” (Jameson, 1998;64); rather, American economic interest and American cultural influence coincide to produce the export of a way of life itself. People often evoke ‘corrosive individualism’ and also consumerist ‘materialism’ as a way of accounting for the destructiveness of the new globalization process; but this consumerism as such, is the very linchpin of today’s global economic system, and also the mode of daily life in which all mass culture and entertainment industries train us ceaselessly day after day, in an image and media barrage quite unparalleled in history (Jameson, 1998;64).

In essence, the modern way of life (as characterized by the ratiocination of the capitalist ethos), in a sort of Althusserian articulation, has reproduced the capitalist ethos as an ideological ontology in which social structures, such as education, serves as ideological apparatuses in order to preserve and perpetuate the social order; in such an instance, the ethos as a result of its institutionalization becomes a way of life. Jameson’s articulation helps to substantiate this claim, and his conception of capitalism as culture not only parallels the views of Weber, Mannheim, and Marx, but adumbrates the positions of many cultural and structural theorists (The Frankfurt school, Althusser, Foucault, Bourdieu, Georg Lukacs, Gramsci, among others) who in conceptualizing the

nature of modern society or the nature of culture in modern society also attribute its basis to human nature's urge to meet their basic biological, psychological, and social needs (Malinowski, Mauss, Harris, and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown to name a few) or to the structural organization emanating from capitalism (The Frankfurt school most conspicuously), the dominant structural mode of production in modernity, and as such, the *raison d'être* for the enculturation of the modern personality. This does not suggest an economic deterministic outlook for the foundation of society; instead, the above-mentioned conception simply accentuates the role that ideas associated with the satisfaction of human needs play in the establishment of structural institutions. Albeit, the other material conditions should not be overlooked (soil, climate, biology, and so on), but the clue for grasping the distinctive nature of human society is provided by those who control its economics. Hence, to view economics as culture is to highlight the role that the ideas associated with those who control the economic system plays in structuring the behavior of adherents irrespective of the structural organization of the system; albeit, in this view the structural organization of the system itself is so structured to adhere to the guiding ethos of the economic mode of production.

Education, the case in point, as a medium of "enculturation" highlights this latter position, especially that of the

Frankfurt school, in that educational curriculum pedagogy, as this paper will show, parallels the organization of labor under capitalism, and therefore serves as a means of “enculturation” to the capitalist way of life. In other words, this paper presents capitalism as the dominant culture or ideologue of the modern zeitgeist; as such, its ideas, most conspicuously the organization of labor, structure the educational pedagogies and curriculums of schools. The emphasis on the organization of labor is such, because it is as a laborer that the self is defined by the dominant class in accordance with the capitalist ethos. Accordingly, the focus of this paper will be to demonstrate how the educational pedagogies and curriculums of schools, as controlled by the cultural elites/capitalists, correlate with the organization of work in capitalist societies in order to provide for a suitable workforce to maintain the capitalist order. To do this, Broward County Public School System’s curriculum pedagogical arrangements will be analyzed and juxtaposed with how work is organized. The historical timeframe of this analysis will focus on the modern era. First, due to the relatively recent rise of the modern schoolhouse, more precisely, the secondary schoolhouse; and second, as a result of the shift from home schooling to the modern public schoolhouse. For the most part, the “enculturation” process during the early phases of capitalism (mercantilism and feudalism) was a function of

the family and the church; however, with the advent of the nation-state system and the rise of public-funded education systems, an attribute of modernity, the family no longer played a major role in the “enculturation” process, and that job fell on public funded educational institutions, not a surprise given the notion that all persons in theory are a ward of the state. What appears as a result of this transition is “an immediate identification of the individual with his society and, through it, with the society as a whole” (Marcuse, 1964;10). This immediate, institutionalized identification forces individuals to “identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them and have in it their own development and satisfaction” (Marcuse, 1964;11).

So in modernity, ideology (that is, capitalist ideology) is absorbed into reality, and as Herbert Marcuse brilliantly observed:

This absorption of ideology into reality does not, however, signify the “end of ideology.” On the contrary, in a specific sense advanced industrial culture is more ideological than its predecessor, inasmuch as today the ideology is in the process of production itself. In a provocative form, this proposition reveals the political aspects of the prevailing technological rationality. The productive apparatus and the goods and services which it produces “sell” or impose the social system as a whole. The means of mass transportation and communication, the commodities

of lodging, food, and clothing, the irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole. The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood. And as these beneficial products become available to more individuals in more social classes, the indoctrination they carry ceases to be publicity; it becomes a way of life. It is a good way of life---much better than before---and as a good way of life, it militates against qualitative change. Thus emerges a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behavior in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe. They are redefined by the rationality of the given system and of its quantitative extension.¹

Capitalist Ideologue and Education

In May of 1990, a committee was formed to conduct a comprehensive study on how well schools prepare young

¹ Marcuse, Herbert (1964). One-dimensional Man. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 11-12.

people for the work force. For the most part, the commission was composed of representatives from American businesses, unions, government, and schools (this effort was organized by the United States Department of Labor and initiated by the former Secretary of labor, Lynn Martin). Members of the commission spent 12 months interviewing business owners, employers, managers, union officials, and employees from a wide range of occupations all over the country which resulted in the release of a final report in 1992. Titled the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), this extensive work was momentous in that it was the first time American business was given a platform to clearly communicate to educators what students need to know in order to be successful in the workplace (accordingly, the report became the cornerstone for President George Bush's educational improvement strategy, America 2000). In all, the report outlined and examined the demands of the nation's workplace and concluded that "...more than half our young people leave school without the knowledge or foundation required to find and hold a good job."² This caused a push for major reforms in school curriculums and pedagogies, "as school boards,

² Excerpt taken from the Scans Report and incorporated in Broward County School Board's version of America 2000 (Focus 2000).

administrators, and teachers were shown that they simply are not teaching our nation's students what they need to know in order to be prepared for the work force of today---the work force of the 21st century” (Blueprint 2000, 1995;v). Moreover, this massive study concluded that:

The qualities of high performance currently found only in our most competitive companies must become the standard for the vast majority of our companies.

Schools must be retooled into high-performance organizations, preparing students to be successful adults.

Students must develop a new set of competencies and foundation skills to be successful adults in this economy.³

Accordingly, the SCANS Report goes on to emphasize five core subject areas---history, geography, science, English, and mathematics, and it states they should be taught and applied within a framework of five new competencies and a three part foundation which highlights and extends the skills and personal qualities that are needed for solid job performance in today's post-industrial job market (see appendix 1).

³ Blueprint 2000 the Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability's 1995-96 School Improvement Plan.

Sociologically, three theoretical perspectives accentuate the SCANS Report's claim regarding the role of education in preparing students for life as laborers in capitalist society: functionalism, conflict theory, and interaction approaches. All three suggests or hint at the correlation between capitalism or the social structure and education; however, to what extent the curriculum resembles the capitalist order is never mentioned nor validated by these approaches.

The Functionalist approach "conceive of institutions as parts or components of total societies or social systems. The parts of the system are discussed in terms of their functions, or purposes in the whole system. The degree of interdependence among parts in the system relates to the degree of integration among these parts; all parts complement each other, and the assumption is that a smooth-running, stable system is well integrated. Shared values, or consensus, among members are important components of the system, as these help keep it in balance" (Ballantine, 1993;8). To this end, a primary function of schools, within a functionalist paradigm, is the passing on of the knowledge and behaviors necessary to maintain order in society. According to the functionalists, "since children learn to be social beings and develop appropriate social values through contact with others, schools are an important training ground. Following Durkheim, sociologists see the transmission of moral and occupa-

tional education, discipline, and values as necessary for the survival of society” (Ballantine, 1993;8).

In contrast to the functionalist approach is the conflict theory approach, which explains mass education within a Marxian and Weberian conception that accentuates tension in society and its parts created by the competing interests of individuals and groups. In other words, “society’s competing groups, the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots,’ are seen as being in a constant state of tension, leading to the possibility of struggle. The ‘haves’ control power, wealth, material goods, privilege, and influence, the ‘have-nots’ constantly present a challenge as they seek a larger share of society’s wealth. This struggle for power helps determine the structure and functioning of organizations and the hierarchy that evolves as a result of power relations” (Ballantine, 1993;9). In a word, “research from the conflict theorists’ perspective tends to focus on those tensions created by power and conflict that ultimately cause change in the system. [Thus,] some conflict theorists see mass education as a tool of capitalist society, controlling entrance into higher levels of education through the selection and allocation function and manipulating the public” (Ballantine, 1993;10). Conceptually, “both functional and conflict theories attempt to explain how education contributes to the maintenance of the status quo in society. However, neither focuses on the individual, the individual’s

‘definition of the situation,’ or interactions in the educational system, as does the third theory[: the interaction theory]” (Ballantine, 1993; 9). This third theoretical approach focuses on individuals in interaction with each other, and emphasizes social-psychological questions. “Sociologists of education using this approach are likely to focus on interactions between groups---peers, teacher-student, teacher-principal; on student attitudes and achievement; on student values; on students’ self-concepts and their effect on aspirations; and on socioeconomic status as it relates to student achievement” (Ballantine, 1993;9).

Theoretically, all three approaches are problematic as they relate to the SCANS Report. First the Functional position would present the SCANS Report as an adumbration of the problematic of structural or institutional incompatibility that arose as a result of capitalism’s development from its industrial phase to the current post-industrial stage, which is characterized by the information-, service-, and communication-centered workplace in predominately First World countries like the US. Hence, the functionalist would argue that education as an institution within the capitalist social system failed to serve the function of preparing the laborer for work, which the aforementioned shift in the organization of work brought about. Ostensibly, the problematic is such because of the functional approach itself; for in the functional sense

(more so the structural-functional sense), the mere fact that the educational system did not undergo a concurrent shift which paralleled the shift in the capitalist system on the whole suggests that education, as an institution, is either not part of the total society or the social system of capitalism, or the conception of capitalism as a functional system is not viable. Conversely, the conflict approach and the interaction position suggests that businesses (the haves) already have a direct control over education and control what kind of knowledge is taught to different individuals of different socioeconomic status, thus controlling who becomes managers and laborers; in essence teaching according to the stratification of the social system. Ostensibly, the SCANS Report, by the mere fact of having to conduct such a survey, dismisses this notion.

Conceptually, however, the postulate of capitalism as culture, presented above in Herbert Marcuse's conception, sees the SCANS Report simply as a means of continuing the correlation between the ideas of the capitalist ethos and the curriculum arrangements of the schools as a productive apparatus or in the Althusserian sense an "Ideological Apparatus" for enculturation. Hence, the research fundamentally was conducted to reorganize the educational system with the new organization of labor so that the "enculturation" process to the capitalist way of life remains viable. Accordingly, the

fact that the report was able to force schools throughout the US to adopt curriculums (Florida's Blueprint 2000 in general and Broward County's Focus 2000 in particular) to parallel its five competencies (Resources, Interpersonal Skills, Information, Systems, and Technology, see appendix 1) that effective workers need for the job market of the 21st century is a clear indication that the sole purpose of education in capitalist societies is to prepare students for the function of work; a proposition which also supports the claim that capitalism is a way of life in-which all institutions are set up to serve the functions, to borrow from the functionalists, of maintaining the capitalist order. As such, the conceptualization of capitalism as culture supports the idea of schools as a mechanism for "enculturation" to the capitalist way of life, which in turn suggests that the education of the individual within capitalist culture is solely as a laborer (for it is that role of the self which is dominant in capitalism), and therefore operates amid, or adhere to, three basic conditions that are generalized throughout a capitalist society. First, workers are separated from the means with which production is carried on, and can gain access to them only by selling their labor power to others. Second, workers are freed of legal constraints, such as serfdom or slavery, that prevent them from disposing of their own labor power. Third, the purpose of the employment of the worker becomes the expansion of a unit