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ABSTRACT
                The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that
conflict, change, and deviance in school board behavior can be
effectively studied and examined within generalized models of
culture. In the first section, problems in studying educational
cultures are identified and the biased views of educational
anthropologists are discussed. Section II presents information on
role and myth in the politics of education and discusses differences
in interpretation of an institution which arise with different
observers. Section III focuses on relationships between culture,
conflict, and school boards. Three basic premises underlie successful
use of a general conflict model to explain school boards and their
operation: (1) that there exists a worldwide culture of education;
(2) that the United States has a national culture of education; and
(3) that the school board can be considered a unique culture.
Categories for understanding culture and conflict within an
educational institution are identified in section IV, including
individual motives of school board members, changing expectations of
society, and balance between the processes of cultural stability and
change. Section V presents a brief summary of the paper. References
are included in the document. (Author/DB)

CULTURES AND CONFLICT IN LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Presented at AERA
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by
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Problems in Studying Educational Cultures

Anthropologists have reached a curious spot in history. No longer

exclusively "in her majesty's service," anthropologists can be found in every

nation of the world. Each nation seems well supplied with anthropologists,

armed with the objectivity that participant observation furnishes them. Each

national university lectures young neophytes on the serious dangers of the

field research and "going native." Although nations, tribes, and organiza-

tional units may be studied ethnographically, their political beliefs may not

be conducive toward furthering open field research, understanding, and some-

times even economic development.

Although no longer in her majesty's service, anthropologists hungry

for grants-in-aid and travel funds find, all too often, their "pure research"

has certain economic restrictions, governmental imperatives, developmental

needs and other such "bug-a-boos." There are innoculations, language barri-

ers, visas and other red tape to wade through, to say nothing of the age old

territorial imperative held by many groups, keeping the intruder/stranger too

busy to really see what is happening or even keeping researchers out at all

costs. For such reasons many present anthropologists decide to look else-

where for field data.

As grants to study exotic cultures become more difficult to procure,

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many social-minded anthropologists began to express their concern for the
state of their own country and culture. After all, many said, why go off
to the exotic, when plenty of institutions need researching here at home.
So at the dissertation stage, doctoral candidates were released from the
difficult task of procuring funds for travel if a study could be tailored
to a topic "at home." Obviously the Pacific/Oceania, Asian or African
major was still out of luck.

For those who could label themselves as urban or educational anthro-
pologists, the cities and schools of America offe~ed virgin territory for
ethnography. Since human beings suffer from the same syndromes of those
they would study, most of these anthropologists were curiously ethnocentric,
if not even a bit narrowminded. Most of these "straight" anthropologists
had limited actual experience in schools. The urban types produced some of
the very worst in extremism in social viewpoints. Moynihan's (1963) study
of the black family reflects that type of report.

Few anthropologists discuss the school as part of a school district.
There are exceptions, most notably Wolcott (1973). The notion that a school
board is a culture unto itself, though part of a general society, is one that
is generally strange to them (Lutz, 1975). For all the admonitions about
cultural bias, most anthropologists cannot help, at this point in time, to
hold intellectually restrictive views of schools. They are limited by train-
ing, lack of interest and/or knowledge of the educational bureaucracy that
exists, and general unwillingness to accept educators who "do" educational
anthropology. This lack of acceptance is at least partially explained in the
preceding description of the inadequacies often plaguing the educator-
anthropologist.

In similar fashion, "ways of behavior" are as prescribed and codified for the school board member as they are for the village council in the South Pacific. Sacred myth and ritual exist in every realm of the educational system. Such problems are not limited to the neophyte teachers, but, in fact, probably increase as one moves up the scale of the educational hierarchy. As Harwood (1976, p. 785) states for another society, "Myths stand behind the social order as charters, and give to social institutions an aura of rightness. That is to say, myths codify and sanction a set of activities, a set which Malinowski terms an institution."

The main point in the above is that, without examining the expressed structure (the one visible and accessible) against the deeper structure (which may be neither readily accessible nor viewable) there is very little hope for either educator-anthropologist or anthropologist of education to understand or comprehend the educational structure. Both types of researchers, unaware of their limitations, not only view each other as "odd" or exotic, but often fail to grasp the meaning of the realities as well as the myths of educational bureaucracies. It is dangerous to carry the view of the school board as "exotic" too far. It is equally dangerous to become so immersed in the educational club that one can barely perceive school systems, let alone the rest of the world, which also has cultures which provide for education in some way.

The Function of Role and Myth in Conflict

So far this paper has been devoted to explaining how different researchers view education and the process that led them to their particular bias. An examination of the notion of the myth as it operates in the school system has also been discussed. It is extremely important to understand

who is observing and perceiving, and some notion about why they see it the
way they do is almost as important as what they see. Context, therefore,
must never be forgotten by the ethnographer, thus providing some focus for
the research. Harwood (1976, p. 786) speaks of the axis of space and time
as possible demarcations between myths. All institutions need myths to sur-
vive. "Given that each mythical charter is tied to an institution and that
it is myth itself which serves (at least in part) to demarcate the boundaries
between one institution and. another, the puzzle arises as to the means by
which the myths are kept separate so as to prevent the boundaries of the myths
from blurring, and to keep myths from running together and coalescing."

Just as what the observer (researcher) sees, and his/her myth absorp-
tion is limited by training and viewpoint, the society's or educational
bureaucracy's view of the researcher, is similarly limited by their current
viewpoint or myth system. Such ideological gaps often express themselves in
myths involving stereotypes such as school board members are influential and
hold property, or school board members dislike collective bargaining. Ideo-
logical gaps account for much of the cultural conflict among the members of
an educational system.

More prevalent and more difficult to ascertain is the nature of conflict,
change and deviance within the educational system. The educational system and
the role of individuals, within groups and among groups, is perhaps best noted
by the dissonance exhibited in perception, viewpoint, and mythical represen-
tation. Just as Raven, a creature of socio-religious invention among many
native North American groups, represents a range of "meaning," from prankster
to an all-consuming, destructive figure (exemplifying many conflicts found
within that culture) the role of superintendent is viewed within a range of

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meaning from culture-hero, to fall-guy/flunky (a Source of all Error). The
latter meaning is often expressed through the process of school board mem-
ber incumbent defeat and superintendent turnover. Who views whom and the
way that is explained serves as the focus of much of the politics of educa-
tion.

Culture, Conflict and School Boards

Anthropologists often divide culture and conflict into more easily
viewed institutions within the culture and the change and deviance exhibited
within them. In essence the old "we-they" idea is self-evident and not very
useful in explaining how members within a culture view others and themselves
and why. The ability to use contrasting general cultural models of conflict
to understand and explain school boards and their operation rests on three
basic premises: (a) that there is a culture of education, worldwide, with
some generally recognizable "universal" categories; (b) that in the United
States there is a national culture of education, depending upon and inter-
acting with the larger socio-economic-political structure, itself a recog-
nizable facet, and, therefore, representative of that larger culture; and,
(c) the school board can be considered a unique culture. Sub-culture is
probably a more correct term for a school board except for the fact that,
like the cells of a body, though dependent on the entire and larger physical
body, all sub-systems of one type act as a complete unit and have a
recognizable type, function, and characteristic behavior so that they can be
referred to as an entity. It facilitates examinations of school boards to
call them a culture.

Gluckman (1968) states the criteria for transferring paradigms are
that they: (1) duplicate the defined type; (2) can be applied to societies

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of different types; (3) express a hypothesis which can be tested on a new range of facts. Thus, Gluckman finds one can test the kingship/rebellion model in the Zulu/Shaka assassination syndrome with equally predictable results because his original principles were logically consistent and corrected with other sets of principles (such as cross validation in field methods). Additionally, logical deductions can be made from these relations to give others another method and can be made against observable facts.

Therefore, how many cultures handle conflict should serve as an available set of models of how school boards handle conflict and, more importantly, how the larger educational system and society handle conflict in the educational system, and how the society "handles" school boards that reach a functionally disruptive point.

Culture is "a cognitive map, representing the categories, plans, and rules people use to interpret their world and act purposefully within it." (Spradley and McCurdy, 1974, p.   ). While "culture is not behavior itself," it is the "underlying rules," a kind of "grammar used to construct and interpret behavior" (Ibid.). Culture is the structural underpinning of society. Because of its immense importance to the society of mankind, whom it serves and yet is invented for and by, it is easy to see how the anthropologist Leslie White saw culture as Super-organic (White, 1963). Carried to the extreme, however, the notion of culture as a super-organic determinant of behavior is dangerous. As Harris sees it (1968, p. 298), "If culture determines how we behave, then what difference is there between a democratic and totalitarian regime other than the illusion to which the actors in the democratic milieu have been enculturated that they are "freer" to choose their individual and collective destinies?"

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How each person views culture and his "place" within it, largely de-
termines his/her actions within it, as well as his/her reactions to it.
Culture, conflict, change and deviances are integrally related to how groups
perceive their position in the larger society. Myths, whether of a reli-
gious or social-political nature, serve to reinforce and "shape" perceptions.
Neither individuals nor groups have to call culture by its name to recog-
nize its pervasive presence. Whether a group calls a counter force "they,"
"The Government," "The Church," "Our Society," "Folks," "Tax-payers," they
are referring to culture, or aspects of it, or perhaps members of such groups
within that culture. The deterministic view of culture as super-organic is
less useful than it is rather one-sided. It ignores the general systems
approach that more closely resembles the workings of nature as we know it.
People "make" culture and interact within the rules and structure of the
culture they "made."

A sub-culture within the larger culture can invent a culture for it-
self that, in time, is non-responsive and no longer tolerated by its larger
culture. School boards often act in such a fashion, becoming masters of the
"if and the but." Should they invent too many such excuses and not respond
sufficiently to the demands of their constituents, they will lose power,
and individual members may lose their seats on the board. In discussing
this tendency it is necessary to understand the ways a culture views itself
and how these views are elaborated within a framework of conflict, change,
and deviance.

Categories for Understanding Culture and Conflict

Le Vine (1973) discusses such concerns in his book, Culture, Behavior
and Personality. He notes that McClelland (1961) treated ". . . the economy

as a 'projective system' rather than a 'maintenance system.' Economic growth reflects 'entrepreneurial activity' that in turn reflects the frequency in the population of individuals high in achievement motivation." Through socially structured opportunities, Le Vine notes ". . . the motives of aggregates of individuals in a population can affect the operations of a national economy and thereby accelerate or retard its growth." (Ibid., p. 87). In such a way economics cannot be ignored in models of school board behavior since school boards are an aggregate of individuals who act as one. If schools are becoming more like big business in terms of fiscal budgets and responsibilities, economic indicators then quite clearly provide a projection of the institution locally as well as within the overall national picture.

Further, Le Vine points out that Lasswell (1930) presented similar arguments for roles in political institutions while Levinson (1959) focused on bureaucratic roles. "Political and bureaucratic roles do not simply prescribe behavior but also provide a public vehicle for the satisfaction of private motives." (Levine, op. cit., p. 87). Spiro (1961a), Le Vine continues, developed a general model for role behavior which included ". . . behavior in economic and political roles as a response to inner needs as well as societal demands." (Le Vine, op. cit.). Thus, political, social and economic variables are part of the cultural mix of a culture.

The classification of school boards in terms of individual motives may best be described on a pressure-response continuum: "Once a collective activity is institutionalized, it cannot be responsive to or reflective of individual motives in any simple way. The institutional behavior of individuals is always an amalgam of their response to the pressure of established

norms and their exploitation of the available opportunities for satisfac-
tion of personal motives." (Ibid.). There is little margin for the con-
sideration by school personnel, from school boards to teachers, as members
of an institutional bureaucracy, to the demands of the individual.

The roles of school board members are probably more vulnerable in
terms of public censure than are the roles of teachers or principals with
tenure. While teachers and principals are paid with tax dollars, the public
is never so easily aroused as when the school board raises taxes through a
millage increase. Such godlike powers tend to stimulate high interest and
concern in the general populace. The school board usually cites current
raises in teacher salaries as the cause of the increase. Such measures and
counter-measures place the educational constituencies of the cultural system
at odds with each other.

Le Vine thinks it is useful to ". . . think of all institutions as en-
vironments that limit the range of options available to the individual but do
not dictate the choices he will make among those options. The patterns of
choice will be dicatated by his personality; insofar as his patterns are
shared with others in the same institutional environment, they may act as a
pressure for normative change." (Ibid.). Thus, behavior which can be ob-
served is equally as important as belief passed through tradition, initiation
and convention.

The society's concept of what constitutes an institution will have
previously set limits for understanding conflict within the institution.
Social structure consists of roles with ". . . normative prescriptions and
proscriptions enforced by positive and negative sanctions." (Le Vine, op.
cit., p.88). Reward and punishment is doled out according to conformity or

the lack of it. These ideas are correct, but do not totally account for

social behavior. Institutions are like the tips of icebergs, says Le Vine.

Most of what goes on is never visible to the public. Educators are fairly

knowledgeable about that fact. Many believe that the higher the power/

authority the less one sees of the actual decision-making process. Even at

"open" public board meetings, much of what is decided or voted upon has in

fact been discussed and concensus reached before the meeting. School super-

intendents call "briefing" meetings where often decisions are made prior to

the announced meetings. Here decisions are made by the board and the super-

intendet's "chosen few."

Conflict results when the gap between public expectations and school

board behavior widens too far for any myth or explanation to explain it.

Conformity-deviance divides by degrees in which everyday choices may be re-

cognized. Since commitment and the sense of one's self (alone and as part

of a group) are tied to the normative structure, choice becomes an inescap-

able part of behavior. This behavior may be categorized according to at

least six levels of normative proscription or prescription.

Le Vine points out that given a six point scale a particular action

is ". . . neither normative or deviant." (Ibid.). Such categories are

usually not completely discrete. The myth of discrete categories clouds the

researcher's mind as well as the public view of groups, such as school boards.

Conflict can often occur because one supposes decisions are made by "virtu

sola" as opposed to "in context."

Deviance from norms occurs as: (a) an expectation of norms, (b) op-

position to norms, (c) a breakdown of norms. School board members show de-

viance along this continuum, and conflict may arise when: (a) the board al-

lows the superintendent to introduce all new policy, (b) when one or more members of the board refuse to vote unanimously on certain policy matters at a public meeting, and/or (c) a totally open public board meeting exists where all public criticism is allowed to be heard.

Conflict and subsequent change are necessary features of any adaptive group. Any group must be able to adapt or else it risks extinction. Mankind survived and evolved, socially and genetically in groups; adaptation being necessary to survival. Groups, institutions and cultures require social adaptation through resolution of conflict and change. Le Vine suggests four basic models of change: (a) Persistance, (b) Breakdown, (c) Progress, and (d) Revitilization.

The Persistence Model shows that the ". . . socio-cultural institutions of a people can change without a drastic alteration of their personalities or of the proximal environment of values (Le Vine, op. cit., p.93). The models for Breakdown suggest that social disintegration is linked with psychological disorder. Normlessness is the hallmark of breakdown. In the Progress model, "The concepts of acculturation, modernization, and achievement entail a model of persons as acquiring new forms of competence appropriate to innovations in their socio-cultural environments." (Ibid., p.94). The fourth model, that of Revitilization, suggests another interesting model of conflict and culture change similar to the cargo-cult revisited in psycho-social terms of adaptation. Basically if a socio-cultural system is disrupted by external or internal forces, its participants will be unable to meet the demands of the culture and disorderliness and disillusionment will result. As discontent rises, various disorders will be discernible, personal and social. Convention will probably be flaunted. "Then a prophet

who has undergone an altered state of consciousness in which he has been able to devise a new synthesis of ideas drawn from the traditional ideological resources of the culture, proposes this as a new and more satisfying code of values." The code may emphasize catharsis (release) or control (discipline) but will contrast sharply with the existing and unsatisfactory system (Le Vine, op. cit., p. 94). While this may sound like a rambling from Castenada's Journey to Ixtlan (1974) or an accurate description from the messianic movement in literature, it also (amazingly) resembles school boards, the personal rise to power and group power struggles. Every incumbent speaks of stability, control and/or discipline as the situation demands. Every insurgent speaks of conflict and change.

Cultures maintain themselves through two basic adaptive processes: stability and change. Each episode of the stability-change process has a consequent set of behaviors that are periodically used to carry out the process.

The three major types of psycho-social adaptations, or bases for conformity to cultural norms, says Le Vine (op. cit., p. 138) are: (a) willing conformity, (b) coerced conformity with motivational displacements, and (c) normative pluralism. The behaviors for change are either institutionally or personality induced. Those which are institutionally induced are: (1) changes in the context of normative demands for role performance or in the enforcement of such demands, (2) changes in the opportunity structure, and (3) changes in the scope and complexity of selective environments. Personality induced changes include: (1) cultural drift, (2) organizational competition and selection, (3) successful innovation within the existing opportunity structure (Le Vine, op. cit., pp. 153-155). Although the above

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is Le Vine's model, it can be successfully transferred to any cultural sub-
group; school boards included. Models of school board behavior such as the
Iannoccone-Lutz (1970) model proposed in this book can be usefully viewed
in this context.

Summary

This paper has emphasized overall models of social theories on cul-
tural conflict, change and deviance. The fact that school boards fit many
of the propositions should serve to reinforce the transferability of ideas
and models and demonstrate that school boards can be studied and examined
within generalized models of culture.

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