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ABSTRACT

A discrepancy exists between what public school personnel and student teachers perceive as ideal academic freedom and their perceptions of the reality of school life. Interview responses from faculty and administration of a school district and from student teachers reveal that both groups practice the social control mechanism of political restraint and self-censorship within the school environment. School district personnel perceived that they had considerable academic freedom and that political restraint and censorship does not exist. They noted, however, that they would not use their freedom because to do so would be inappropriate and unprofessional since both sides of an issue should be presented. In contrast, student teachers reported substantial restraint or censorship during their experience in the schools, particularly in the areas of sex, religion, race, drugs, and politics. Although these data suggest that student teachers and practicing school personnel perceive school climates differently, student teachers also recognize the legitimacy of imposing these restraints. Therefore, both groups operate within an ideology of restraint in school affairs which is the complex product of school purposes, traditions, personnel, and cultural hegemony. (Author/KC)

IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL RESTRAINT & CENSORSHIP

by

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Recent scholarship in education has directed attention to underlying ideological considerations in the examination of schooling policies and practices. Such American scholars as Bowles & Gintis (1976), Carnoy (1975), Anyon (1979), Apple (1979), Giroux (in press), Popkewitz (1978) and others use ideology as a means for analyzing schools, extending similar European work in education and institutions by such scholars as Young (1971), Jenks (1977), Carlton (1977), Habermas (1968), and others. The common stance in these works is to be critical of the functionalist or capitalist ideology which pervades society and its institutions, particularly the schools, as agents of transmission and reproduction.

Ideology, used in this form, is usually negative in valence, carrying the weight of common usage which assumes that ideology is unthoughtful, and the weight of orthodox Marxism which held ideology in contempt as false consciousness. Giroux (in press) offers the use of ideology - critique which "provides a productive starting point for analyzing the historical and contemporary processes whereby existing beliefs and practices exist as legitimations of a given society." Thus, there is a difference between ideology as a restrictive mind-set imposed from the outside and seemingly

static, and ideology as an interactive and dynamic process which is, as Giroux notes, directly related to cultural hegemony.

On the one hand it is easy, and a bit chic, to simply label the schools as tools of capitalist ideology, or the Soviets as puppets of Communist ideology. Many examples can be used to demonstrate this, but the static quality of the statements presumes a universality and everlastingness for a particular ideology that doesn't account for contrary evidence, or the critique one would desire for any previously unquestioned concept. Ideology as a part of hegemony, however, assumes that there is an underlying set of beliefs and values held by a dominant class but in constant tension in its expression and action.

Thus, the hidden curriculum has more dimensions than simple reactionary slogans or robot-like acceptance. It is possible to examine economics and history textbooks and show how they treat laboring classes as inferior and show their presentation of dominant class history as equivalent to the total of social history. It is also possible to show how school tracking merely assigns the progeny of social classes to their approved positions. These observations and analyses are certainly pertinent and worthwhile, but they often ignore the dynamics of ideology and the complexity of the tension suggested by Giroux. It may not be possible to stand outside of one's own cultural background and inquire fully into its ideologies, anymore than it is possible to be a pure scientist unencumbered by social ethics or cultural baggage. But, as the scientist strives to step outside and look in, it may be fruitful to examine schooling practice beyond the political and economic to see other networks and to consider the school as a dynamic institution.

It is in this context that studies conducted over the past several years may provide some clues to the operation of ideology in the perceptions of school personnel of the legitimacy of social control mechanisms of political restraint and censorship (Nelson, 1977; Nelson, Palonsky & Naylor, 1978; Palonsky & Nelson, 1980). These studies include a case study of a single school district, interviews of student teachers from two institutions and the accumulated data from student teacher interviews conducted over a four year period. While the nature of the studies does not permit generalizations to a larger population, the findings provide a basis for hypotheses about the dynamics of political restraint and censorship, and provide data for consideration of ideological dimensions. Preliminary data from a current case study of a school district in California suggest that the pattern of responses from the initial study in New Jersey was not an isolated example.

In some respects the findings from these studies were diverse, as one might expect. The case study incorporated depth interviews of a wide variety of school personnel including school board members, key administrators, librarians, guidance counselors, and a broad cross-section of elementary and secondary teachers. The student teacher interviews, however, were entirely of persons who had undertaken teacher education programs and who had completed a student teaching assignment in one of many schools near the institution(s) involved. One group, then, had a substantial investment in the district under study; the other group were essentially individual college students who had differing experience in different districts. The divergent opinions occurred in response to questions eliciting perceptions of school climate for controversial issues and the form and extent of restraint.

Case study data from the district in New Jersey, with preliminary data from the district in California being consistent, show that school district personnel perceive that there is considerable freedom to discuss controversial topics and that there are no areas of political restraint or censorship (65% reported no restraint). Student teachers, however, reported substantial restraint or censorship (about 70% of the respondents noted some limitations) during their experience in schools, and many of them identified a pervasive atmosphere of restraint in schools. The topics identified most frequently by student teachers as being restrained or censored were sex (51%), religion (35%), race (30%), drugs (20%), and politics (18%). Of the 35% of the school personnel who perceived any restraints, the most frequently identified topics were racism (19%), deviant sex (9%), radicals (5%).

These data suggest several things: that student teachers and practicing school personnel perceive school climates differently, with school personnel more content and student teachers more critical; that experience and professional socialization reduce variety and produce more common perceptions; that institutional and self-selection procedures operate to inculcate conformity of views; that the school personnel have an image of an enlightened educational atmosphere and that image influences their perceptions, and that the student teachers have an image of what ought to be and their perception of reality in the school does not match the image.

In the last hypothesis, there is an assumption of agreement on what levels of freedom ought to exist in schools. Throughout the studies there is a common thread of values represented by school personnel and student teacher responses that less political restraint and censorship is better. There is a

shared value, or ideology, of teacher freedom. Yet that teacher freedom is itself restrained by the ideology.

In terms of ideology, some considerations are posed by these limited studies. It is apparent that both practicing school personnel and student teachers included in these studies are drawn from a common social milieu, and beyond that from a common institutional setting (schools) and from a commonly identified social objective - teaching.

Dominant ideology in this society is implanted early and carried forward in large measure through the very institution which holds these respondent groups together. People who are radicals are not usually attracted to institutions whose primary obligation is the preservation of dominant social values. That schools are conservative institutions, devoted to reproduction of social values and dominant social control is not a remarkable concept at this time. John Dewey, Willard Waller, Upton Sinclair and Michael Apple might use different terms, but each has shown that principle of education. Those who stay in schooling longer, through higher education, presumably are subjected to larger amounts of this, and are typically more responsive to it since school sanction systems permit those who absorb schooling better to continue. That is magnified when the intention of the student is to become a primary figure in the continuation of schooling, as through teacher education. The self-selection of teaching as a career involves some anticipatory socialization since those who pick teaching have had considerable experience in schools and with potential role models. That is not as likely in other occupations; nurses, bricklayers, surgeons and accountants are often outside the continuing experience of those who select those fields. And the

institutional selection procedure often rewards those whose behavior conforms to established practice in teaching. The competency-based teacher education program is among the most advanced ways of assuring conformity to the norms and values of the dominant class.

Given the ideological configuration of an institution devoted to the preservation of society and the common agreement of professionals on the need for teacher freedom, there is tension between the idealized concept of academic freedom and the culturally hegemonic condition of social preservation. In different terms, the teacher and teacher candidate who espouse freedom from political restraint and censorship, do not actually mean complete freedom, even of ideas. Rather, they tend toward willingness to impose self-restraint and self-censorship on the nature and manner of treatment of controversy.

There is then an ideology of restraint in school affairs which is the complex product of school purposes, traditions, and personnel, and cultural hegemony. This ideology is dynamic in the sense that its observable symptoms fluctuate as conditions change, but there is an underlying set of dominant values which influence school personnel and observer perceptions.

For example, the majority of school personnel responding to questions about their freedom to present personal views of social issues in classrooms claimed that they had the freedom, but would not actually do it because 1) it is inappropriate, 2) it is unprofessional or 3) both sides of an issue must be presented. These responses indicate a shared belief that teacher views may exert undue influence on students, and that is inappropriate or

unprofessional, yet the respondents did not recognize that teacher and school traditional views are constantly being presented. Similarly, the standard idea that "both sides" should be presented whenever the teacher has a personal view which differs from the teacher's perception of the socially acceptable view, succumbs to the defects that 1) there are usually more than two sides to any really controversial matter, but the acceptable notion is that there are two mainstream views and thus, radical views are not even considered, and 2) the concept of equality in classroom presentation completely ignores the dominance of socially acceptable views throughout the rest of the student's life.

On the latter defect, cultural hegemony as it works on students in and outside of classroom settings, an interesting position is presented by the application of an idea from Herbert Marcuse in his "Essay on Repressive Tolerance," to schooling. This application is suggested in an otherwise obscure book which includes the postscript to Marcuse's essay and which comments on what schooling might be like if Marcuse were taken seriously (Nelson, Carlson & Linton, 1972).

Essentially, Marcuse notes the condition in society where non-traditional views may be tolerated but given no serious hearing because the hearers have been, and are continually being, indoctrinated to traditional views through standard socialization practices. If schools wanted diverse viewpoints given full and equal opportunity for expression and consideration, the whole of the school could be devoted to such views. This would provide some equality in time compared with the whole of the lives of students. Of course, that is a most unlikely event, the use of the schools as a center of social criticism,

but it suggests that both sides of an issue are presented is not based on a real sense of intellectual fairness or equality, but on an ideologically based agreement with the forces of cultural hegemony.

The apparent disagreement between student teacher and school personnel responses pales in an ideological context. They seem to represent "both sides" of perceptions of the school where the sides are limited to mainstream views. There was only one student teacher in the four years of interviews who identified himself in radical terms - an anarcho-syndicalist. And even he understood that during student teaching and if he obtained a teaching job, he would need to keep his views in the closet. Most of those interviewed, school personnel and student teachers alike, knew of incidents of administrator-imposed restraints, book censorship, parent objections which resulted in direct and subtle restraint practices in schools, and similar practices which produce chilling effects on teacher freedom and which cause self-censoring and caution. Thus, there is a tension between what school personnel and student teachers perceive as an ideal of teacher freedom, and their perceptions of the reality of school life. Student teacher respondents appear to recognize more disparity between these conditions, but also recognized the legitimacy of the school in accepting or imposing these restraints.

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