

Cultural and Critical Perspectives on Human Development

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Chapter 4

Changing Classes:**Shifting the Trajectory of Development in School**

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“What has become increasingly clear in these debates is that education is not just about conventional school matters like curriculum or standards or testing. What we resolve to do in school only makes sense when considered in the broader context of what the society intends to accomplish through its educational investment in the young. How one conceives of education, we have finally come to recognize, is a function of how one conceives of the culture and its aims, professed and otherwise.” (Bruner, 1996, pp. ix-x)

“[M]any current trends in critical pedagogy are embedded in the endemic weakness of a theoretical project overly concerned with developing a language of critique. Critical pedagogy is steeped in a posture of moral indignation toward the injustices reproduced in American public schools. Unfortunately, this one-sided emphasis on critique is matched by the lack of ethical and pragmatic discourse upon which to ground its own vision of society and schooling and to shape the direction of a critical praxis.” (McLaren, 1995, p. 32)

Introduction

How does school change young people? What do teaching and learning consist in? I spent a lot of time thinking about these questions during visits over three years to a small urban fringe school district in southeastern Michigan. Believing we still lack adequate answers to these questions, believing that education, as Bruner puts it in the opening quotation, “is not just about conventional school matters like curriculum or standards or testing,” I was keen to understand the developmental processes of schooling. I did this in part by putting everyday classroom practices under the microscope (cf., Packer & Greco-Brooks, 1999), but also by considering the schools’ relations to broader contexts. Too often, school classrooms are studied as self-contained entities, when in actuality they exist in complex, contested, and changing relations to local

community and to society's political and economic arrangements and priorities. Examining the "situatedness" of schooling--viewing the institutions of public schooling against the backdrop of community context and the shifting political and economic landscape--highlights the ways schools turn children into particular kinds of adult (Packer, 2001a; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Specifically, in this chapter I try to answer the question, 'What do schools do?' by exploring disparate answers school reform efforts offered to the question, 'What should schools do?' Every attempt to change schooling assumes some conception of how schooling works; by comparing reform efforts we can draw some inferences about the adequacy of these conceptions.

This might seem an unusual way to study development, since it looks not directly at children but at the institutional arrangements into whose custody children are placed, and at the efforts of practitioners, bureaucrats and politicians to alter these arrangements. But the institutions of schooling define the practices and relationships in which children participate and develop. Looking at these arrangements, and attempts to reform them, offers a way to move beyond sociocultural accounts of children's development that are purely face-to-face and explain how contexts and processes operate on schools--and on children--to make their influence felt (cf. Serpell, 1993 for a review of the complexities of this task).

In the modern Western postindustrial world, becoming an adult means coming to participate in a society that, often regrettably, assigns people very different and unequal structural positions of class, gender and ethnicity. Critical theorists have insisted that school is an institution that plays a crucial role preparing children for this aspect of adult life. But developmental psychology has only just begun to explore and explain how children take up such adult positions. On the one hand, socialization theories typically reduce the whole process to the simple transmission and internalization of values and norms; on the other, structuralist developmental theory has generally insisted that all children's development follows with logical necessity a universal pathway. Such accounts remain blind to the political and economic significance of schooling and school reform; blind too to the intimate connections between human development and societal continuity and change.

To try to do justice to these complex connections requires drawing from both cultural and critical perspectives. Cultural psychology is changing our understanding of human development, showing how social and historical circumstances provide the artifacts, the mediational means, whose appropriation is a central aspect of development, and showing us that what counts as development, as maturity, as adulthood, varies with time and place. Developmental psychology has typically viewed development as a natural process, but we now appreciate that it is a praxis both social and historical. At the same time, critical pedagogy is changing our understanding by showing how the development of the person is a crucial facet of

the economic and political processes upon which society depends. No social order is self-sustaining; its continued existence depends on the continuous and appropriate actions of its members, and its continuity over time requires a continual supply of properly prepared newcomers. That the development of children to adulthood is one phase--and a crucial one--of the reproduction of society is an important insight. And the two perspectives can correct each others omissions. Cultural psychology has generally not taken time to consider the political and economic institutions in which culture and community are located (cf. Packer, 2001 b). Critical pedagogy, on the other hand, while cognizant of these larger influences, has adopted an unduly restricted view of "cultural production" in schools.

This chapter is organized around a case study, the description and analysis of events in a single school district in one region of the United States. A single case, but this district was caught up in debates and forces whose significance was far larger than its small and particular geographical compass might suggest (cf. Packer, 2001a). My work was intended to be concrete, practical, and relevant; I aimed to leave the ivory tower and make a contribution in the real world, yet still bring something of relevance back to the academy. The latter is the focus of this chapter: implications for our understanding of children's development in school, informed by both cultural and critical perspectives. My conclusion will be that a sociocultural account of development must include both the recognition and relationships of "lifeworld" interaction, and the way "rationalization" of school along with other social institutions implements a distal ontology.

Willow Run Community School District

Willow Run is a small rust-belt community in the U.S. industrial Midwest. Largely working class, about 40% African American, 60% Caucasian, the district has just eight schools--an early childhood center, five elementary schools, a middle school and a high school--with a total enrollment of around 4,000. The community is poor; across the district around 46% of students are on the free or reduced-price lunch program.

The community was hit hard in 1992 by the announced closing of a large auto-assembly plant. Its identity and survival had been intimately tied to this massive industrial plant, built in the 1940s for assembly-line production of B-24 bombers. Workers flooded to the plant from all over the country, and others followed after the war when it was retooled for automobile production. It provided well-paid jobs on the assembly-line to generations of young adults, most without a high school diploma.¹ But now GM decided to consolidate production with a plant in the south, and suddenly the economic basis of the community was threatened. This painful event offered a unique opportunity to witness the relations among classroom, district,

community, and larger political and economic processes, made visible in historical change. How, I wondered, would the district schools respond?

I discovered immediately that significant efforts were already underway to change the practices of classroom instruction in the community schools. In order to both understand those changes and to try, in an appropriate way, to facilitate them, I joined the committee that was trying to encourage “systemic change” throughout the district. As their “official observer” I attended the meetings of this committee, school board meetings, Town Hall meetings, traveled to the state Department of Education with other committee members, visited and observed in classrooms, and interviewed teachers, students, parents, the superintendent and other administrators. I focused my attention on transitions--in and out of school, from one grade to the next, the first day of the school year, and so on--believing that here too changes make customary practices and expectations more evident.

It turned out that there was much more complexity to the economic and political context of these local reforms than I had expected. First, the Willow Run plant closing was a small, though significant, part of a major structural transformation in the U.S. economy, especially in the auto-manufacturing industry which had dominated Michigan for almost a century. Second, Michigan’s governor soon initiated reforms of the state’s public schools. Third, the National Science Foundation had recently organized a national program of school improvement, and Michigan and Willow Run became part of this. And, fourth, the history of the community turned out to be unusual and important.

I can only summarize these influences briefly in this chapter (cf. Packer, 2001a, for more detail). I begin with the economy, then describe the local reform efforts in the community schools and the two larger reform initiatives. Before turning to the history of the community I point out our current lack of an adequate conception of the “cultural production” of the classroom. Then I describe how the local reformers recognized that the children brought their class origins into the classroom, needs and attitudes that stemmed directly from the fundamental organization of working-class life under fordism. I’ll argue that the local reforms’ hands-on, student-centered pedagogy was grounded in a tacit understanding that teaching and learning are relational and cultural phenomena, an understanding grounded in a practitioner’s involvement in the “lifeworld” of schooling. A more adequate conception of cultural production can be found here. In contrast, the tacit conceptions of schooling that underlay the large-scale school reform initiatives arose from our society’s rationalized economic and political systems, and amounted to efforts to rationalize public schooling. The developmental processes in school involve ontological change--change in the kind of person a child becomes--and increasing this is becoming a “relationalist ontology” as rationalization has its effect.

School and the economy: Structural economic transformation

The economy of the U.S. is being transformed, undergoing a structural upheaval in which “fordist,” standardized production is replaced by “postfordist,” flexible production. Fordism, as one might guess, began at Henry Ford’s Highland Park factory in Michigan, where the Model-T was built. Assembly-line production, with labor divided into a myriad repetitive tasks, provided Ford with dramatic cost-savings and productivity gains. It required and imposed a fundamental division of labor: planning, ratiocination, and control by engineers and management; execution and obedience by assembly-line workers. And this division of mental labor from manual labor came to shape the life-styles, the tastes and attitudes, of the two social classes of capitalist society, including the different attitudes the working class and middle class have to work, to knowledge, and to schooling.

But a new way of organizing production is being adopted in many industries, not least (though arguably last) by the auto manufacturers. Japanese auto imports, produced using techniques of “smart production,” challenged the Big Three in the 1970s. Now Chrysler, Ford and General Motors are striving to make production more efficient and profitable by rationalizing design and manufacturing, outsourcing, increasing worker productivity, downsizing, and relocating plants. All of these strategies played a part in GM’s decision to close its auto-assembly plant in Willow Run.

Much is made of the fact that flexible production requires new skills and attitudes on the part of workers. The Fordist division of labor is now too simple and inflexible; workers on the line now must be computer literate, able to work collaboratively, identify inefficiencies in the production process, monitor quality continuously and--above all--be “flexible.”

In the eyes of many, these new job skills call for new kinds of preparation by the public schools. Indeed, schools have been blamed for failing to keep up with the changing workplace, for failing to provide the kinds of worker needed in the “new economy.” By 1992 the United States was in a recession considered the worst since the 1930s Great Depression, and the new chairman of IBM, Louis Gerstner, wrote an Op Ed piece for the New York Times:

“Our schools are failing: do we care?... It is a deeply dangerous situation. We cannot transform business and the economy without a labor force that is prepared to solve problems and compete on a global level.... If public education does not reinvent itself to meet these goals [the national goals of the Bush administration and the new Clinton administration’s Goals 2000 legislation], and fast, it is the entire country that will be out of business” (Gerstner, 1994)

Gerstner’s views were shared by many, nationally and certainly in the state of Michigan, which was faring especially badly. The state’s economy had faltered due to the

national recession and the deep problems facing the Big Three auto manufacturers, slow to adopt the new organization of production. A group calling itself "Michigan Future, Inc." put it this way:

"The emerging New Economy demands employees who can solve problems with fellow employees without being told what to do by a supervisor or foreman. It demands employees who can keep learning new skills and master sophisticated technologies. The new economy requires very different schools and ways of learning--schools where students learn by working together, and where teachers coach students instead of telling them what to do." (Michigan Future, Inc., 1992)

Local reforms efforts in the Willow Run Community School district

But the Willow Run schools were already in the midst of change. A new superintendent had succeeded in boosting the district's image--Willow Run is literally the other side of the railroad tracks from the working-class city of Ypsilanti, and both are looked down on by "liberal" Ann Arbor--and in getting voters to permit bond refinancing to purchase technology, including a Media Center in each school and computers in most classrooms, and refurbish buildings. He was widely credited with boosting morale, balancing the budget, and raising test scores. And several of the district's schools were experimenting with new approaches such as integrated instruction, common planning time, teachers working in teams, consensus-driven decisions, and with new kinds of curriculum material and academic task.

For example, in the 1992-93 school year students in Kettering Elementary School's grades 3 through 5 took part in a semester of project-driven inquiry. Students worked in groups to design and construct scale model buildings--a mall, homes, the school itself. Team-taught, they moved between their classroom and the artroom, drew, cut, glued, decorated, then wired the buildings with batteries-and-bulbs lighting. Math, science, art and writing came together, and parents became involved too, helping their children cut foam board in the art room. In "process writing" the children reported on their project; going through as many as seven drafts, reading one another's work and giving feedback.

These innovations were not smooth sailing. The staff grappled with problems of timing, issues of ownership, and how to strike the appropriate balance between discovery learning and direct instruction. For example, children didn't use scientific concepts as clearly in their writing as the staff had expected. But this was a trial run at drawing the children into literacy and numeracy, into cooperative work and collaborative problem solving, through "hands-on, minds-on" academic tasks. The children struggled with new social and intellectual demands. Some of the buildings were destroyed in frustration several times over. But the structures were rebuilt, and some children built more houses at home without the teachers' help. The group building

the model of the school discovered the concept of π as they measured the circumference of its pillars to work out the radius for their model. Parents came to help cut the foam board, and help with the children's work in the artroom. The art teacher had to tell one parent, "No you don't, this is your daughter's painting," when they did what the principal called "copping a paint." Another parent told a teacher, "The kids know more about measuring than I do!" "But we didn't scare her away! And she still helped the child...!" the teacher told me, in a tone of awe.

The GM plant closing provided both renewed impetus and increased opportunity for these efforts. The day after the closing was announced the superintendent was quoted in the local newspaper, saying "We were getting encouraging news, so we were feeling good about it. It's very bad, very, very bad." In 1997, five years later, in an interview with the same paper, the superintendent spoke in highly optimistic tones of the community becoming "freed" from its past. The closing loosened the auto-industry's grasp on the community for a moment, and lightened the pressure of the iron hand of capitalism. The relationship to the plant had provided security but it had also been deadening.

But before the success of these local reforms could be judged, their direction and impetus were altered by two large-scale initiatives for school reform.

School and politics: Market-place reforms

It was concern with the economic problems of the state and its "business climate" that led the new Republican Governor of Michigan, John Engler, to demand reform of the state's public schools. This was necessary, Engler said, to better meet the needs of industry in Michigan so as to attract new businesses and lessen dependence on auto manufacturing. These "market-place" school reform initiatives immediately had an impact on the pace and direction of the local reforms.

In July 1993 the Michigan legislature was debating, not for the first time, the problem of inequitable funding for public school districts. A Democratic senator, reportedly trying to call the Governor's bluff, proposed complete elimination of property tax funding for the state's public schools. Startlingly, the Republicans accepted her proposal, and it passed state Senate and House in a record 24 hours. School began that year with funding set to vanish in December, and no alternative source of revenue identified.

Each party proposed plans for funding the schools, and Engler insisted that the debate address not only finance reform but also what he called "quality reform" initiatives. He reported the views of Michigan business executives that "the state's education system is broken and needs dramatic repairs to boost its quality."

And so in 1994 the citizens of Michigan voted to approve raising the sales tax to finance the state's public school system. But they were not offered the chance to vote on the "quality" reforms, which went into effect through legislative action. In the following years Engler went on to accomplish sweeping changes in Michigan's schools. He backed redesign of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests, in order that they test student achievement in "higher order" thinking and problem solving. He successfully proposed charter schools (Public School Academies), parental choice across school district lines, a longer school year, teacher certification tests, and new school accreditation standards. He repealed many provisions of the School Code--for example, bilingual education is no longer mandated, districts can determine their own definition of sex education, and professional development funds must be spent on training directly related to student achievement. In addition the governor can now declare a district "educationally bankrupt" when test scores or graduation rates are too low.

School and the government: State Systemic Initiative reforms

A federal school reform effort was building at the same time. In 1990 the National Science Foundation launched its "statewide systemic initiative" (SSI) program, targeting math and science education in the nation's public schools.² The concern behind the initiative was that new emphases on teaching children to solve complex problems and apply knowledge to novel situations threatened to leave minority and poor children behind, because the schools serving these groups often lack the trained teachers and other resources for such "higher order" learning (Smith & O'Day, 1990; O'Day & Smith, 1993).

The architects of systemic reform, Marshall Smith and Jennifer O'Day, were convinced that an "equality of educational opportunity" is "necessary for responsible citizenship in our diverse modern society" (Smith & O'Day, 1990, p. 262, original emphasis). Our modern democracy and complex world needs people who can grasp "differing perspectives and novel approaches" (p. 263). Their concern was moral and political, not economic, with a focus not on efficiency but on equality. "Simple justice dictates that skills and knowledge deemed necessary for basic citizenship and economic opportunity be available to all future citizens" (p. 263, original emphasis).

For the systemic reform initiative, the task was to "deliver" the new "higher order" knowledge and skills fairly, without regard to race, class, gender, or language, and to do so in a way that still allowed local school districts freedom to choose curriculum, instructional strategies, topics, and language of instruction (O'Day & Smith, 1993, p. 265). The approach sought to avoid problems previous "top-down" and "bottom-up" reform efforts had encountered: local responsibility and control would be "married" to the "vision and guidance" of the federal government.

To do this would require “aligning” the elements of the public school system--course content, curriculum materials, teacher training and certification, inservice training, and student assessment. Direction would be provided through a “common content”--the “curriculum frameworks” many states have developed, defining what children should know at each grade level. State and federal policies would also be aligned to provide “coherent” support to local schools.

Michigan submitted a request for SSI funding in 1991 and was awarded funds on the second attempt, in September, 1992. (Altogether NSF funded twenty five states, plus Puerto Rico, awarding each around \$10 million for five years.) The “Michigan State Systemic Initiative” then issued a Request for Proposals to local school districts willing to become “focus districts” modeling change. Willow Run submitted a proposal in May 1993 and received notice of funding that summer.

The classroom: Site of production, or just site of exchange?

How to interpret these three very different but intersecting reform efforts? And what light do these reforms throw on the structure and processes of the school classroom? It might seem that critical pedagogy has already thoroughly explored the linkages between school and society. But ironically the analytical tools critical pedagogy has forged for this task are not fully adequate. There is an odd bias in critical pedagogy’s account of what happens in the classroom, a “one-sided emphasis on critique” noted in the opening quotation from Peter McLaren. Critical pedagogy has promoted a view of schooling as merely a site of “cultural exchange,” rather than of genuine “cultural production.” And rather than facilitate the task of constructing a theory of children’s development in school, this view makes that task more difficult by viewing students as passive unless opposing the institution’s goals.

Henry Giroux has noted the problem:

“Reproduction theorists have overemphasized the idea of domination in their analyses and have failed to provide any major insights into how teachers, students, and other human agents come together within specific historical and social contexts in order to both make and reproduce the conditions of their existence. More specifically, reproduction accounts of schooling have continually patterned themselves after structural-functionalist versions of Marxism which stress that history is made ‘behind the backs’ of the members of society. The idea that people do make history, including its constraints, has been neglected.” (Giroux, 1983, p. 259)³

The consequence of this is that “schools are often viewed as factories or prisons, teachers and students alike act merely as pawns and role bearers constrained by the logic and social practices of the capitalist system” (p. 259). Such accounts downplay human agency and resistance, and

ignore the contradictions and struggles in schools, and they unwittingly justify neglect of teachers' and students' concrete interactions. "Radical educators... have generally ignored the internal workings of the school and have tended to treat schools as 'black boxes'" (p. 282).

Giroux believes this economic-reproductive model has helped illuminate the role of schooling in the reproduction of labor power and the relations of production, countered those who blame school "failure" on the individual rather than the institution, and exposed the ways class and power shape schooling. However it has done this with a "grimly mechanistic and overly-determined model of socialization" and so leaves "little hope for social change and even less reason for developing alternative educational practices" (p. 266).

Giroux does acknowledge some exceptions to this generalization, especially work by "resistance theorists" such as Michael Apple, Paul Willis and others. Such workers have drawn upon cultural studies and ethnography to restore in both theory and method "the critical notion of agency" (p. 260). In such accounts schools are "contested terrains," marked by "collectively informed student resistance." The central messages and ideologies of school are often refused, in "complex and creative fields of resistance." Schools, says Giroux, "provide spaces" for oppositional behavior, and have a degree of autonomy from the economy, often existing "in a contradictory relation to the dominant society" (p. 260).

These "resistance" theories focus appropriately on the culture of subordinate classes and groups, "constituted as much by the group itself as by the dominant society" (p. 261), self-produced as well as reproduced, "forged within constraints" that vary from school to school, and they, also appropriately, emphasize the importance of paying attention to "cultural production" and to the creative and active work that is accomplished collectively on this level. "In the concept of cultural production we find the basis for a theory of human agency, one that is constructed through the active, ongoing, collective medium of oppressed groups' experiences" (p. 284).

Paul Willis has defined cultural production as "real, collective processes at particular sites and at particular human stages. These processes involve agency and collective activity, including perhaps as their most specific activity not passive positioning in discrete kinds of reproduction (i.e. class or gender), but profane combinations and inversions of resources taken from these things; not helpless inhabitation of contradictions but active work on them" (Willis, 1981, p. 51).

Not surprisingly, Willis' analysis is more attentive than most to informal cultural production inside and outside the school, but he too submits to the bias McLaren and Giroux have identified. Genuine cultural production, writes Willis in his ethnography of working-class kids in the English midlands, takes place only outside the classroom, in the informal structure of the small group. At least for working-class youth in the circumstances in which

Willis finds them, “the school and its formal time-table lies tangential to the real processes of learning and of the preparation of manual labour power” (1977/1981, p. 176). He grants that, like any institution, schools have a cultural level, as well as official and pragmatic levels (p. 177), but his emphasis is the way “an oppositional informal culture” (p. 178) achieves in an unintended manner the educational objective of directing working-class youth ‘voluntarily’ into working-class jobs.³ Willis describes the “basic teaching paradigm” (p. 63) as “essentially a relationship between potential contenders for supremacy” in which the teacher, lacking actual power, seeks “moral supremacy” through the “idea” of teaching as a “fair exchange--most basically, of knowledge for respect, of guidance for control” (p. 74). Knowledge will in turn be exchanged for qualifications, these for pay, and this for goods and services. While Willis does note phenomena such as students “seeking approval from an acknowledged superior in a very particular institutional form,” as well as the prevalence of individual competition (p. 65), and the importance of ‘attitude’ (p. 69), these are all interpreted as parts of “the exchange relationship in the educational paradigm” (p. 67) and as evidence of its coercive and controlling character. (Cf. Packer & Goicoechea, 1999 and Packer, 2000, for an alternative discussion of these phenomena.) In the background here of course is Marx’s insight that value is created not in exchange in the market-place, but in active production by labor. So when Willis describes the school classroom as merely a site of an “exchange” (of knowledge for respect), he implies that nothing of value is created in the classroom.

Willis has responded to criticism that he failed to appreciate the active stance taken by students other than “the lads.” “Although the book did not focus on the conformists, ethnic groups, or girls, it seems hard that the whole approach should be accused of assuming the passivity or invisibility of these groups when it turns so much analytically precisely on general qualities of activity” he writes (1981, p. 61). But at the same time he grants, “The case of the “ear’oles” (working-class male conformists in the Hammertown case study) is admittedly somewhat more complex, and they became--more as a stylistic device than as a theoretical necessity--somewhat of a foil for ‘the lads’ in the write-up of the book” (p. 62).

Even McLaren sees students as active only when they resist school’s “hegemonic ideology.” In statements of ostensible empirical fact like the following the interpretive framework of critical pedagogy will grant no creative activity in conformity:

“It was a rather grim paradox that when students were not working, they became active participants in resistance, and when they were at the mercy of the bleak self-effacement of instruction, they remained, for the most part, passionless observers and passive recipients of over-packaged (and over-cooked) information.” (1989, p. 156)

In sum, critical pedagogy too frequently simply inverts the values of the typical school, viewing refusal to do what the school regards as learning, and rejection of its definition of

success, as an active and creative stance; viewing success in the school's terms as becoming a passive victim. But this simplistic reversal makes no sense. While it is true that resistance is the occasion in which students' active, creative engagement is most evident, this does not mean that those students who don't show active opposition in the school are simply passively internalizing institutional messages. A working-class child who adopts middle-class, liberal democratic values and struggles to achieve in school and enter a profession may, from the viewpoint of a particular political stance, be faulted for abandoning their class of origin and supporting an inequitable system, but they cannot accurately be faulted for passive inactivity. Crossing a boundary between classes takes hard work, whether it is applauded or decried by others, whether or not it is a politically conservative move. Nor can this be ignored because it is not a "collective" enterprise, for, after all, the middle-class liberal notion that people can act as independent individuals is rightly held by critical theorists to be an illusion. In reality the children who choose to pursue a career of individual accomplishment are still members of a community, and can only act as they do as a consequence of this, even though they themselves are unaware of it.

When Giroux, for example, makes a parenthetical comment that the hidden curriculum is "internalized by (read imposed on) students," he and other critical pedagogists forget what cultural psychologists stress: that internalization is itself an active and creative process.⁵

Just as it is necessary to draw on the strengths of critical pedagogy to correct cultural psychology's tendency to neglect broader political and economic institutions and processes, it is necessary to draw upon the insights of cultural psychology to correct critical pedagogy's tendency to find agency only outside the classroom, and in those who oppose and resist the school's agenda. It is necessary, in other words, to draw on the strengths of cultural psychology and critical pedagogy to overcome limitations that each of them suffers from. We need to hold onto both the insight that all children are active agents, shaping their own fates, albeit without complete freedom or control, and the recognition that schooling is about the reproduction of society. We need to resist too quickly dismissing the classroom as a place where nothing of value is created.

Local reforms and fordism

In contrast to the paucity of critical pedagogy's theoretical conception of cultural production in the school classroom, the local reformers showed a practitioner's keen awareness that children bring needs and attitudes to school that shape their engagement in the classroom, and that the instruments of classroom assessment are actively taken up by students. This awareness was the

basis for efforts to transform the classroom and so transform children who were human products of Fordist capitalism.

The district's local reform efforts evinced a rich grasp both of the concrete realities of children's lives and of the community the schools served. When the staff and administration in Willow Run described their efforts to "make learning fun," to make teaching more "student-centered," they were guided by their familiarity with the needs and attitudes of the children in the local community. The kind of instruction in the "wire-a-building" project I have described is, of course, much the rage these days, going by the name 'constructivist pedagogy.' But the local reforms had a broader goal than this, and a deeper significance than is often the case with teaching 'higher-order' thinking skills. Adoption of new kinds of activity was just one aspect of a larger reorganization of classroom life and of the kinds of relationship and recognition it permitted. To understand this we must consider how the children of Willow Run brought their class origins into the classroom; we must recognize how the needs and attitudes of such children stem directly from the fundamental organization of working-class life under fordism. The schools' efforts at reform amounted to a riposte to the way capitalism shapes its human products.

The fordist division of labor, the manual labor/mental labor split, is the origin of different class attitudes to forms of labor and knowledge. Working-class culture takes a critical attitude toward theoretical knowledge and book learning. Paul Willis noted among manual workers in the English midlands:

"a massive feeling on the shopfloor, and in the working class generally, that practice is more important than theory.... The shopfloor abounds with apocryphal stories about the idiocy of purely theoretical knowledge. Practical ability always comes first and is a condition of other kinds of knowledge. Whereas in middle class culture knowledge and qualifications are seen as a way of shifting upwards the whole mode of practical alternatives open to an individual, in working class eyes theory is riveted to particular productive practices. If it cannot earn its keep there, it is to be rejected." (Willis, 1977/1981, p. 56)

Willis adds: "The working class view would be the rational one were it not located in class society" where theory is disguised, its ties to material reality cut, turned into the currency of social advancement. Theoretical knowledge increases options for the middle class. For the working class it does nothing.

The economic conditions of the two classes reinforce these differences. Fordist production involved not just a division of labor, it rested on exploitation of working-class labor: the profit that flows from selling products of their labor belongs to the factory owner, not the workers. The working class are unable to foster the "distance from necessity" (Bourdieu,

1979/1984) that the middle class enjoy. They must maintain a functional and pragmatic attitude, where the middle class can afford to be detached and indifferent. (Figure 1 sketches the class needs and attitudes that stem from the division of labor and economic circumstances of fordism.)

-- Insert Figure 1 about here --

The poverty in Willow Run meant children came to school hungry and tired, starving for adult attention, with little experience of reading or being read to, expecting to fail. Many came from families in which parents had themselves often tasted failure in school. These parents expressed the hope their children would succeed where they had not, but at the same time few of them provided the preparation that middle-class families take for granted. The schools struggled to find ways to satisfy the children's needs and address their attitude. The local reform efforts were sanguine about the children's background, their families' lack of resources, and the poor self-esteem, low expectations and everyday stress many of these children brought with them to school. The hands-on, student-centered pedagogy caught the attention of children born to a culture that valued manual labor and practical reasoning. The emphasis on practical activity with concrete products made sense to both children and parents. I came to see the local reforms as an important experiment at making schooling newly relevant to the lives of children of working-class culture. (Figure 2 illustrates how the local reforms dovetailed with the children's needs and attitudes.)

-- Insert Figure 2 about here --

Aptitude and attitude

But the local reforms undertook more than introducing academic tasks likely to appeal to and engage children who saw knowledge as practical, and more than seeking to address the children's material and emotional needs. The local reformers recognized that what the Willow Run schools had to do was not just teach new skills, but change children's attitude to learning. This involved touching not just their cognition but their motivation, even their personality. The task amounted to preparing the children for a new life-style, a new way of life, as their old one vanished. If the community was to be preserved this could only be done by transforming its children.

Central to this transformation was a change in the way students were assessed and evaluated in the classroom; a renunciation of central elements of the traditional classroom. Public schools, both in the U.S. and elsewhere, have been indicted for being institutions that

read differences in culture, background and attitude as differences, even deficiencies, in ability and aptitude. So-called revisionist or functionalist critics of schooling argue that it is class-biased; that both the skills taught and values promoted in schools are middle-class, so that working-class children find the habits and attitudes they have acquired at home provide little benefit or preparation when they enter the classroom. When schools, these critics suggest, make judgments of ability, as they do in the form of grades and test scores, they are in actuality measuring class or ethnic background, class or ethnic culture. Typically in school “a social gift [is] treated as a natural one” (Bourdieu, 1974/1982, p. 391).

For example, Bowles and Gintis in their classic study of “Schooling in capitalist America” (1976) argued that the “liberal goal” of turning to schools to compensate for the economic inequities of a capitalist economy is a “vain” one. Power and privilege have their origin in the economy, but they surface everywhere--in the family, in everyday interaction, and in school. Schools, they insist, inevitably draw young people into institutional relationships that reproduce the hierarchy and discipline of the workplace, and so reproduce the modes of consciousness required of workers.

Forty years ago, sociologist Talcott Parsons (1959) described the way the traditional elementary school classroom establishes a single “axis of achievement,” along which students are sorted. Parsons noted that the moral and intellectual demands of classroom tasks are fused, in the early grades at least, so evaluation in effect measures ‘achievement motivation’--that’s to say, willingness to work.

Parsons assumed that children differ naturally in ability, measurable as IQ, and that schools’ sorting was functional, preparing children for appropriate positions in an organic social order. Joseph Schumpeter (1955/1951), an early analyst of modern capitalism whose work is still viewed with respect by economists, noted how a capitalist economy relies on differences in ability. What Schumpeter’s and Parson’s analyses failed to appreciate is that the abilities about which judgments of differences are made are social products, not natural properties. So they also neglected the transformative effect on children of such evaluation and sorting.

We now know that aptitude is not so neutrally observed and assessed--that what schools, for the most part, treat as natural and essential is in fact socially conditioned, the product of a particular social structure, and an unfair one at that. Sennett and Cobb (1972) described the result of schools’ evaluation: how working-class people come to see themselves as less emotionally controlled and lacking the developed inner complexity of the middle class. These blue-collar workers see formal education as providing freedom--in the form of permission to control situations, and access to a greater set of social roles. Even those who cope and are relatively successful feel powerlessness--and judge themselves inadequate for this sign of their vulnerability. They feel they are less deserving of respect because they have failed to become

individuals, instead remaining “average” members of the “mass” (equivalent to “the masses”). Yet at the same time the work “educated” people do is regarded with revulsion, considered undignified, undeserving of respect, and in many respects immoral. There is keen awareness of white-collar corruption and crime.

As Sennett and Cobb insist, “What needs to be understood is how the class structure in America is organized so that the tools of freedom become sources of indignity” (p. 30, original emphasis).

The Willow Run teachers and administrators had good reason to be familiar with the phenomenon of children failing in school not because they lack ability but because of their cultural background. And so the new approach to pedagogy, the “hands-on, minds-on” learning, was coupled with moves away from the unitary axis of the traditional classroom. The slogan “all children can learn” (part of the district’s new Vision Statement; often repeated in meetings of the WRSI committee) asserted a belief in the equality of students, a belief put into action in the form of experimentation with portfolio assessments, attention to differences in learning style, celebration of differences in interests, main-streaming, and elimination of tracking and ability grouping.

For example, Kettering’s first grade teacher was relinquishing elements of traditional instruction one by one. She had abandoned ability-based reading groups--the “Robins,” the “Bluejays” and the “Buzzards”--because the children always knew “who could and who couldn’t, who the haves were and who the have nots were.” Instead she had begun whole-group instruction, had replaced workbooks with journals, added learning centers, and was exploring a whole-language approach with reading-through-writing, classroom projects and collaborative group activities. Her expectations of students were now based less on notions of ability and aptitude and more on the assumption that every child was learning whether or not results were immediately apparent. She talked of children suddenly able to comprehend printed text and thereafter making continuous progress.

“And lo and behold it didn’t matter that they couldn’t read the first three books, all of a sudden they were reading the fourth book. Learning through osmosis or whatever, they had picked up all the way, and they hadn’t been alienated, they hadn’t been earmarked, ‘You’re a dummy, you can’t read, this is what you’re going to do for the next twelve years.’ They just blended right in. Everyday there’s another one that’s jumping on the Reading Train, that’s the way I look at it, and it’s really amazing.”

On one wall of her classroom was a literal Reading Train--a railroad made of construction paper, the students represented by bears in boxcars. This was still a linear representation of academic progress--as students worked through the sequence of reading books they advanced

along the tracks--but differences in progress were not immediately interpreted as differences in ability.

These changes in the classroom were paralleled by changes in the relations among professionals throughout the district. Once the Willow Run Community Schools received SSI funding a committee was formed to coordinate local reform efforts. The committee visited each of the district's schools. From the outset one central message was that we were not there to tell people what to do, or even to say that current practice was wrong. The committee's approach was to avoid any "top-down" imposition of new teaching approaches by those in authority, and instead to foster a climate in which staff and administration were equal partners, trying new approaches and taking risks together. They insisted that there was no "one best way" to schooling. As the district's curriculum coordinator, co-chair of the WRSI committee, wrote in an e-mail to committee members:

"If we believe that student learning should be facilitated and not directed then we must have that same belief system for teachers and others. Then the question is, what are the questions that we must raise in order to have teacher and staff think more deeply about what it is they are doing, why they do what they do, what are some things they could do differently, and where can and should they go for more information and assistance?"

In both cases--student learning and professional development--there was a tacit understanding that learning is not solely intellectual, and that evaluation is not simply an exchange of equivalents.

Schooling as relational and cultural

Elsewhere I have laid out in theoretical terms the understanding of learning and development that I came to see embodied in the local reforms (Packer & Goicoechea, 1999).⁶ It is an understanding that schooling involves ontological change, change in the kind of person a child becomes. School is a social institution designed to transform children. Schools draw children from their families into new social contexts, new forms of social relationship, and situations in which new kinds of expertise are called for. The culture of the classroom is one in which children enter into relations that are abstract rather than personal, based not on personal characteristics but on role or position. "Student" and "teacher" are new, abstract subject positions. And the symbolic media of reading, writing and arithmetic transform the child's attitude to objects and events that have hitherto been lived and grasped immediately.

Because human beings are reflexive, we actively take up the definitions others offer us. It is the desire for recognition that draws children into these abstract relations (cf. Packer &

Greco-Brooks, 1998), and over time children adopt an attitude towards the sources of recognition and respect in the classroom, as these are granted or withheld. And this is how identity is forged in the culture of the classroom, in relationship and practical interaction with peers and teacher, through alignment with or against the available forms of recognition.

In such an account, what happens in the school classroom is, for all students, an active and creative process, an accomplishment, that teacher and students engage in together. A school can compel (or prohibit) attendance, membership in the classroom culture, and performance of academic tasks, but schools cannot, however, determine the attitude, the stance, children adopt within this social context. This is always an active choice on the part of the child. It is because schools cannot control the stance students adopt to the sources of recognition that "attitude" often becomes an issue. School is the site of important developmental transformation--whether children resist and drop out, or conform and graduate. Teaching and learning have a cultural and relational character without which problem-solving, skill-acquisition, and intellectual inquiry would not occur. To ignore this is to fail to grasp the interplay of the cognitive and social aspects of schooling, and to fail to see what is at stake in school reform initiatives.

In the traditional classroom, recognition is structured in terms of the single axis of achievement described by Parsons, and children either align with or against this axis. The resulting attitude is either a faith in meritocracy or a resignation, a humbling, a wounding of dignity, as cultural differences are read as differences in natural ability. The whole arrangement serves to rationalize and legitimate the economic inequalities and exploitation facing the working class under Fordism, and to sustain its inequitable social order.

In the reformed classrooms sought in the Willow Run schools, the axis of achievement was being replaced with an expectation that all children would learn. The aim was to change the relationship between teacher and student so that recognition would be given to initiative, not obedience. This in turn could change children's attitude to their learning, to their abilities, to their own futures. The local reforms were a search--grounded in necessity as much as idealism--for a mode of schooling which would engage, not alienate, children whose background provided little preparation or incentive for the traditional school classroom, aimed at more than merely preparing the children to be workers in the "new economy." The reformers were attempting to change the kinds of person the children would become, and to improve their opportunities for a better life. The superintendent explained:

"All my life I've believed that there are certain parts of the population which are underdog for one reason or another, and it is up to all of us to work with them, and they should succeed.... They have to have the same chance as anybody else, maybe more

because they come from underprivileged homes which is a disadvantage for them when they get to school.”

The Willow Run Ethos

An important resource the local reform efforts drew upon was a community ethos of sharing and equality. Describing this ethos requires a short retelling of the community’s history, a story first told expressly for the district’s children, in a book titled “The Story of Willow Run,” commissioned by the school district in 1956. The community was described then as one where “Everyone looked for a solution for the other fellow as well as for himself” (Wilson, 1956, p. 88). The book told of how in 1941 the Ford Motor Company won a government contract to build B-24 bombers--the “Liberator”--using its new assembly-line technology, and how a factory was built on a soybean farm that old Henry Ford owned, on a stream known as Willow Run.

This factory was variously called “the most enormous room in the history of man,” “the arsenal of democracy,” and “a sort of Grand Canyon of the mechanized world.” Floor space covered 67 acres--3.5 million square feet (more than the office space of the Empire State building). The assembly-line itself was 3/5 of a mile long and, at the production peak, bombers rolled off the line and onto the runways behind the factory at the astonishing rate of one an hour.

Bomber production needed many workers and Ypsilanti, the city closest to the plant, had a population of only 12,000. In a matter of months 32,000 people--workers and their families--moved into the county from all over the U.S. Ford was reluctant to provide housing for them, and so a shanty town sprang up. When the Federal Housing Authority proposed construction of a permanent housing project the local residents were horrified. The Local Board of Commerce issued a statement:

“We welcome any growth that comes with due regard to normal peacetime life but dislike even to think of the effect of the loose aesthetic values almost sure to follow in the wake of an enterprise so gigantic. Ypsilanti is a settled city with a definite character, and we don’t want the character to be changed.” (Carr & Stermer, 1952/1977)

Eventually the Federal Housing Authority financed “temporary” housing, but the newcomers were still considered hillbillies, undesirable white trash. This prejudice, together with the Spartan conditions in Willow Village, caused the new arrivals to keep to themselves, making do as best they could.

Compare two statements. The first is by one of those war-time newcomers, quoted in “The Story of Willow Run”:

“The whole secret of those glorious days was something actually quite rare in our world’s society--kinship. Our problems were basically the same. Our ages and our goals

were basically the same. No one could be selfish and survive. We needed each other.

We needed encouragement and sympathy and help. Beyond this, we needed to belong. I think we were like a family, a good family.” (Wilson, 1956)

The second is what a high school student, a 10th grader, told me when I went back to visit the schools in 1997. “If you go out in our community, our community is a community. It’s not just people living in different areas. There is a community sense.” She talked about the stereotyping of the community and its schools, then added: “Just because we don’t have enough money, you know, doesn’t mean that we’re not as smart and we can’t get the best education. We find our ways. And if you know how to survive without as much money you know how to live in the real world, cause in the real world you won’t always have money, you won’t always have people providing the best things for you.”

Similarly, a recent letter from the district to parents referred to “the great Willow Run tradition of caring and commitment,” and a recent report from WRSI to the Michigan State Systemic Initiative cited “a group cultural norm of support.”

These statements point to an ethos of equality and mutual assistance special to Willow Run. I don’t intend to debate whether this ethos is reality or myth; in either case it provided a resource for structuring relations among administrators and teaching staff, and for reorganizing the classroom. The local reformers drew on this ethos when they explicitly interpreted “systemic” to mean “not top-down,” and when they encouraged ideas and initiatives for change from the teaching staff themselves, not imposed by administrators or outside experts. As a result, when some teachers expected to be told what to do, this was interpreted as their fear of taking risks, fear of failure, to be overcome by building community and support. And when the committee struggled with the difficulties of encouraging teachers to relinquish worksheets and textbooks, with limited funds for professional development, with fear of change, the Willow Run ethos was invoked to guide the actions taken.

Competing logics of school reform

The state and federal reform initiatives seemed at first to have goals congruent with those of the teachers and administrators in the Willow Run schools. The local reforms seemed not to be fundamentally at odds with what Gerstner and others were demanding: for example, both valued “higher-order” thinking skills, as important preparation of children for adult life. Indeed, it seemed possible that this was a time when:

“What is ‘best’ for companies is also, more and more, ‘right’ for people.... [F]or the first time in the history of industrial capitalism, the interests of businesses are consistent with those of citizens, consistent with the yearning for intellectual cultivation, self-direction, uniqueness, and zest in work.” (Avishai, 1994)

Yet it turned out that neither of the large-scale reform initiatives did much to facilitate local reforms in Willow Run. On the contrary, they made these local efforts much more difficult. In part this was because they embodied very different conceptions of how schools work, in part it was because they were efforts to rationalize schooling.

The coexistence of the local reform efforts with not just one but two large-scale reform initiatives--and ultimately their clash--highlighted a divergence in underlying conceptions of schooling. The market-place and systemic reform initiatives were organized by rhetorical/rational frameworks that were quite different from each other, and from the local reformers' conception of schooling. They both operated within one of society's two "systems of survival": "commerce" and "guardianship" (Jacobs, 1992) respectively. Products of society's economic and administrative systems, they each showed the relentless and incommensurate logics of their particular sphere.

On the one hand was an economic metaphor, with schooling understood as a process of production. Governor Engler sought to increase the efficiency of this process in order to improve the quality of its product: the schooled child. A quality index such as the MEAP test would ensure more efficient production by providing feedback to consumers, increasing accountability of teachers, schools and districts, and introducing competition among schools that would break the monopoly of public schooling. The reform effort rested crucially on employing an adequate measure of "output" that could be put into play against the money and resources, the raw material, "input" to the schooling process.

On the other hand, the systemic reform initiative employed a political metaphor, with schooling viewed as a public service, an element of social infrastructure--like the post office, or the highway system--that distributes or delivers learning to students, its public. This reform initiative sought to ensure the equity of this distribution, through coordination of the delivery system. Central to this was the notion of "alignment": all the components of the delivery system must be appropriately coordinated--like getting water pipes lined up in the basement, or making sure the mail truck meets the plane on time and so gets the packages to the delivery person.

At first glance it might seem that these are simply trivial metaphors, barely relevant to the proposed reforms or their outcome. But I would argue that, on the contrary, these metaphors betray the fundamental logics underlying and organizing each of these large-scale school reform initiatives. These logics shape the conceptualization of the problem facing public schooling, and of the appropriate forms of a solution, within each initiative. Each was a coherent logic, but together they were largely incompatible, for the two different rationalities clashed, one emphasizing competition and efficiency, the other coherence and equality. So while there was apparent convergence in these reforms' conceptions of the goals of public

schooling, their conceptions of how to achieve these goals differed to the point of incommensurability, and these reforms' implicit conceptions of how schools work were significantly at odds.

Rationalization of public schools

There is a second feature to the two large-scale reform initiatives: their underlying motive of the rationalization of schooling. Habermas (1981/1984; 1981/1987) has drawn a distinction between lifeworld and system aspects of society. The first is the intersubjective, sociocultural field of social relations and face-to-face interaction, the second is the structural organization, integration and differentiation of society's institutional components. Schools can be viewed as a component of societal systems, or as an aspect of the lifeworld. Viewed as a system, schooling requires strategic action in service of functionalist goals. Viewed as part of the lifeworld, what is called for is debate to define and achieve shared norms. In terms of this distinction, the local reforms in Willow Run can readily be interpreted as a lifeworld response, in that they embodied detailed tacit knowledge about the particular needs and attitudes of the local children, and drew for resources on the practices and ethos of the local community. The large-scale initiatives, in contrast, are efforts to rationalize the organization and functioning of U.S. public schooling, seeking to apply an impersonal rationality to what was viewed as a dysfunctional social system.

Coleman (1993) has described the "rational reconstruction of society" that the social transformation of North America has brought about: the shift from a natural to a constructed physical environment, from "primordial" to "purposively constructed" social organization, from a focus on the family to forms of social structure that include corporations and legal individuals, from face-to-face, organic community to rationalized, bureaucratic, impersonal interaction. In such changes there has been a progressive transcendence of place, a move from local to national economics and politics, and an erosion of primary institutions like the family with diffuse and multiple functions, to narrow-purpose constructed organizations, especially the workplace and school.

As rationalization proceeds, the elements of social structure become positions and offices, rather than persons, who are now merely temporary occupants of these positions. In "primordial" organizations social control came mainly from norms, status, reputation, and moral force, generated largely by informal consensus. "Closure and continuity provide[d] a form of social capital on which the effectiveness of social norms depends" (Coleman, p. 9). But this social capital has been so eroded that modern communities lack "the coercive power on which the effectiveness of norms, status, and reputation depend," and new modes of social control must

be developed, by means of new entities: rules, laws, supervision, formal incentives, and sanctions by designated agents.

Schools are a central institution in which children are prepared for life in a rationalized society, and the large-scale reform efforts can be seen as efforts at the further rationalization of this institution.

The school as lifeworld

I've been building the case that the local reform initiatives embodied a rich practical understanding of the nature of working-class life and of working-class children's needs and attitudes, of the complex dynamics of classroom interaction and evaluation, and of the ethos of the Willow Run community. The local reforms were grounded in a tacit understanding of the ways teaching and learning are relational and cultural. This understanding informed a conception of reform as a communal enterprise, risky and challenging, in which there can be no single solution, and in which change must be facilitated, not directed.

The Willow Run reformers believed that only by changing the expectations in terms of which children were judged in school, and altering the relationship between teacher and students by, in turn, transforming the community and culture of the classroom (and of the school, indeed the district), could these children not only come to learn, but become "life-long learners."

In all these ways, the local reform efforts were surely grounded in the lifeworld of schooling, not in its institutional structures,

A critical stance

The interpretation of the large-scale reform initiatives as arising from society's two "systems of survival" and as aimed at rationalization, while the local reforms are grounded in the lifeworld, aimed at facilitating cultural change, raises a number of questions. Is a political or an economic logic more appropriately applied to public schooling? Is a "monstrous hybrid" (Jacobs, 1992) created by their conjoint application? Indeed, is any rationalization effort detrimental to the lifeworld of schooling? After all, Habermas (1981/1989) has suggested that rationalized systems tend to displace communicative action and language, the "genuine and irreplaceable medium of reaching understanding" (p. 342), and undermine the structures of intersubjectivity of the lifeworld. In the "irresistible irony of the world-historical process of enlightenment" (p. 155), rationalization makes possible heightened complexity of societal political and economic systems, but this engenders hypertrophy and the imposition of "system imperatives" that "burst the capacity of the lifeworld."

I consider these empirical rather than conceptual questions. But where should the critical researcher of public schooling stand to try to answer them? How should one judge the adequacy and appropriateness of these competing demands of schooling, these competing goals

for what society should seek to accomplish with its schools, and competing conceptions of teaching and learning? If one grants that value-neutrality is not an option, what viewpoint does one adopt, and how does this influence one's inquiry? Feinberg (1983, p. 142) points out that reproduction historians of education (he calls them "revisionist") have typically neglected to acknowledge the basis of their own critical stance. He sees "two independently critical pivots" operating in most analyses of educational reform: "a commitment to upward mobility and equality of opportunity for all members of the society," and "a commitment to local authority and community participation in the affairs of education," and notes that these two may clash, leading the researcher into contradiction. And Gutmann (1987) considers these reproduction theories (she calls them "functionalist") apolitical, in the sense that in assuming that schools deterministically serve the interests of capitalism they discourage discussion of how citizens resolve debates over schooling, and also action along such lines. My decision was to allow critique to emerge immanently from the local setting: to view the state and federal reforms through the lens of the local practices of the lifeworld; to listen to the voices of children, teachers and parents in order to hear how their concerns were fostered or thwarted. And in May 1997 I returned to the district to discover how things had turned out.

The systemic reform approach ostensibly sought a combination of "top-down" and "bottom-up" elements, but in practice the Willow Run staff found themselves on the receiving end of "top-down" mandates for "bottom-up" change. They perceived in these a failure to "walk the talk" on the part of systemic reform. In addition, bureaucratic requirements--annual reports, yearly plans, progress assessments, all in predetermined categories and formats--sapped energy from the local efforts and forced upon them a homogeneous and stultifying vocabulary.

The official evaluations of systemic reform started to appear after the first couple of years of the five year program, first from the states, then the feds. There was quick acknowledgement that reform is harder than it seems--in particular that the school system needs not just "alignment," but also "capacity building." It is, after all, not sufficient to get the water pipes lined up if they're not large enough to sustain an adequate flow. Ironically, the "capacity" the SSI reports appealed to was pretty much the very things the local reformers in Willow Run had attended to from the outset. The evaluation reports defined capacity first in individual terms, in terms of dispositions, views of self, and the persona adopted in the classroom--"the new standards for students require everyone in the educational system to change their role and relationships" (Goertz, Floden & O'Day, 1995)--and then in terms of the culture of school and community, including outside networks and relations. Individuals operate within "communities of practice," the report declared. Systemic reform had, it concluded,

insufficiently targeted this element. But the report didn't question the adequacy of systemic reform's underlying conception of schooling.

If SSI neglected community and relationship in the schools, Engler's reforms were destroying them. Engler was getting national visibility as a result of his actions: President Clinton arrived in Michigan a few days after I did, because Engler had offered Michigan as a proving-ground for the national achievement tests Clinton had been promoting.

Yet local opinions about what Engler had done were unmixed. "He is ruining public education in this state," one teacher told me. Several people pointed out that the MEAP test had become the overriding consideration in school reform: it was the measure of both student achievement and school performance, the basis for school accreditation, and drove curriculum because although no curriculum content was mandated, the test items were linked to specific materials. And it was now also the basis for the state to seize control of "failing" schools. There was an appearance of local control and choice, but in actuality everything was now driven by a single measure of quality.

"This sure feels like a mandate, but there's nothing I can do with it, there's no way I can change it, I can't protest it. If you [have] a mandate, there's usually a process that you can impact it. You can't impact this kind of system! They'll still be messing with you, but it's not official so therefore you can't do anything with it. You can't even tell people that it's happening, because it's not official." (Interview with county administrator, May 1997)

Scoring of the test was drawing attack from many districts, both rich and poor. The category cut-points--defining students as "proficient," "novice," or "not yet novice"--were seen as arbitrary, and as designed to fail kids, because the test was intended to "pull instruction." The director of the Michigan principals association pointed out that "If 96 percent of students were scoring proficient on this, it [the test] would be considered a failure."

"Everything that I have seen indicates to me that there's every intention of creating--and they're doing a darn good job--of increasing the distance between the haves and the have nots. They absolutely do not want to see what they consider to be kids in the underclass succeed." (Interview with district administrator, May 1997)

Despite these criticisms, the Willow Run school board, disappointed by the district's low MEAP scores, had threatened to fire school principals, and this had led in turn to plans to hold teachers individually accountable for their students' scores. This was creating a climate of fear and anxiety, and splintering the culture the local reformers had been working to build. The Board Chair was quoted in the local paper:

"I'm not threatening anybody. I'm just telling people to do their job. You can't come back here year after year with the same scores. There are no excuses. In private industry, if you have results like this, you wouldn't have a job." (Miller, 1997)

So although the market-place reform initiatives claimed to foster, indeed to depend on, local initiatives for improved instruction, they had the effect of stifling these initiatives and narrowing curriculum and instruction. Willow Run found itself pushed to choose curriculum materials that would match those upon which the achievement tests were based, and the school board demanded that instruction focus on the test. More dangerously, the tests were being used in a manner that had the effect of labeling poorer school districts lower in "quality," even though their students arrived at school less prepared by family and community (more accurately, differently prepared) than in wealthier districts. Longstanding differences in resources became read as differences in the "quality" of schooling, just as differences in children's cultural background have so often been read as differences in "ability."

Conclusions

The typical story we are told about U.S. public schools is that changes in the economy are leading to a "workplace 2000" (Boyett & Conn, 1992; Johnston & A. H. Packer, 1987) that requires new problem-solving and communication skills. This means that students must be taught "higher-order" competencies, which necessitates that the school classroom implement reformed curriculum and pedagogy. But this story is incomplete. The economy is certainly changing, but in addition to new kinds of work there is an altered social contract, one in which workers are being forced to adopt what amounts to a new way of life, to abandon as unworkable the stable, relatively affluent lifestyle of the "blue-collar middle class." This means that preparing students for the workforce requires inculcating attitudes to work and learning different from those of their parents.

Is the "new economy" really something new? The economic exploitation of fordism continues in postfordism. Its basis is no longer the division between blue- and white-collar work, but the distinction between a small inner core of employees with secure employment and an outer core of part-time and temporary workers. From both, "flexibility" is demanded: the inner core are expected to work long hours if salaried, to work mandatory overtime if paid hourly. The outer core are hired only when and as needed. Flexibility means willingness to work long hours, in temporary positions, with stagnant wages, and to accept relocation and downsizing. Unemployment is at an historical low today, productivity extraordinarily high, and capital returns are startling. But there is a hidden dark side to the economic boom of the 1990's. A silent majority are not benefiting. Six hundred thousand jobs were lost in 1998 alone, and while the

majority of those laid off found new employment, generally pay was lower, benefits fewer, and security less.

If economic exploitation continues (albeit with the new name of flexibility), it must still be rationalized and legitimized. It would be no surprise, then, to find public schooling pressured to continue to sort children and attach to them what Sennett and Cobb called “badges of ability.” The school reform initiatives with the greatest impact in Michigan, the market-place reforms, seemed directed more towards “increasing the distance between the haves and the have nots,” than improving the quality of education for all. The “interests of business” and “those of citizens” do not coincide, nor do they share the same “vision of the kind of human beings” children will become. A cynical interpretation of the situation in Michigan would point out that if market-place reforms have the effect of labeling poor districts and poor children as second-rate, then this reform has indeed served the needs of the economy for newly “flexible” workers. A workforce that has been led to see itself as inadequate is more likely to accept the terms of the new social contract.

The question, then, of how to reform the school and classroom so that children from working-class families have an equal opportunity to learn is an important and contentious one. It is not simply a technical question, nor one of alternative means to a common end, because schools can operate to legitimate the economic relations of postfordist production, or to challenge them. The “new economy” makes new demands of workers, and these are not just intellectual demands. “Attitude” is the quality employers regard as most important when they hire a new worker (Applebome, 1995). And schooling, I suggest, is in a sense all about attitude.

What does this tell us about the developmental processes in school? I’ve argued that development and learning entail ontological change; change that cuts deeper than the epistemological constructions developmental psychologists have typically considered. The processes that bring about such ontological change in the institutions of school are, I have suggested, relational and cultural ones. But these processes are themselves not unchangeable: they are subject to transformation, in the process we call history.

The Willow Run Community Schools found themselves on the edge of history, caught up in the structural transformation of the nation’s economy, in a national program to make schooling more equitable, and a state-wide effort to improve its efficiency and quality. Far from being passive in the midst of these forces, the Willow Run staff and administration took the initiative, drawing on available resources and working around obstacles. The larger reform initiatives sought to rationalize public schooling, bringing to bear on one hand a political and bureaucratic rationality, on the other a business and economic rationality. They are exemplars of a general historical trend that increasingly draws local communities and local action into

larger institutional webs. The larger reform initiatives operated without an adequate understanding of the cultural and relational character of learning and teaching--but this didn't diminish their impact. The rationalization efforts depended for their effect on the continued operation of the lifeworld of the school, without having an adequately conceptual grasp of the lifeworld's character.

This rationalization is, consequently, an important aspect of the developmental processes of schooling. Failure to consider its existence and impact blinds us to the political and economic influences on children's growth to adulthood. It seeks to define and impose the ends of development, and often its means; the product and the process of development. In short, it seeks to shift the trajectory of development. Both the "economic" and "political" school reform initiatives touched and tried to alter the relationship between lifeworld and system: the local and the distal, the neighboring and the remote. Each had something to say about the roles that distant centers of power--state government, business conglomerates, national and multinational industries, the federal government--should play in the day-to-day life of public schools, and the degree of autonomy local communities should have in running schools. The classroom is less and less the primary context defining who students are. In Habermas' terms, the lifeworld of the classroom is being penetrated by the system and its imperatives, and this threatens a "bursting of the capacity of the lifeworld."

This means that children's development in school is increasingly shaped by the larger webs in which schools are located, rather than by purely local exchanges among teacher and students. These webs exert a mediated, indirect action, so that it is easy to mistake the classroom for a self-contained unit when it is in actuality a node in a wide-ranging social network. The extended networks exert a "relationist ontology" (Latour, 1997): they provide the recognition--positive or negative--in relation to which children forge their identity.

We must grapple here with the complexities of developmental processes on several scales: schools seek to change children; the reform efforts aim to change the institution in which children change. And altering the trajectory of development becomes necessary when a way of living proves no longer tenable, due to changed political or economic circumstances. This "development of development"--that is to say, innovations in the institutions that define specific developmental pathways--is not a simple matter, especially when there is a political struggle to define who children should become. But for the developmental psychologist, or anyone interested in the future of our children and our society, understanding what is at stake, understanding the social relationships and practices within which children become adults, and identifying and understanding the factors and forces that hold current developmental trajectories in place while generally going unnoticed and unquestioned, is a crucial enterprise.

Notes

- 1 The adjacent Hydramatic plant is still operating, producing automatic transmissions.
- 2 Strictly speaking, NSF is not a federal agency but an independent U.S. government agency.
- 3 Giroux agrees on this last point with Willis' (1981) criticism of Althuser (1972), almost word for word.
- 4 As Willis sees it, this cultural production involves an ironic reproduction of the exploited positioning of the working class, because the small group of 'lads' valorizes labor power, their capacity for manual labor.
- 5 Cf. Packer, 1993. Giroux perhaps get close to my view when he suggests that reproduction and resistance theories "share the failure of recycling and reproducing the dualism between agency and structure" rather than linking these "in a dialectical manner."
- 6 The empirical investigation described in this chapter and the theoretical reading and reflection leading to that paper occurred simultaneously. The notion that school involves ontological change through relationship and culture developed as reading informed empirical inquiry and vice versa. The paper and this chapter thus each flatten out what was a circular and dialectical process of discovery, and in this respect misrepresent its character. I can find no more adequate form of exposition, however.

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FORDISM		Division of Labor	
		mental	manual
Economic Conditions	purchased loyalty	Indirect, cognitive & symbolic relation. Distance from necessity; detachment, indifference, separation of form & function.	
	squeezed labor		<p>Obedience, punctuality, strength & tolerance of monotony.</p> <p>Pragmatic, functional, sensual & immediate relation, due to scarcity of social & material resources.</p> <p><i>Needs</i></p> <p>Physical needs—for food and rest.</p> <p>Emotional needs—for attention and security.</p>
			<p><i>Attitudes</i></p> <p>Resignation to failure. Comfort in routine. Tolerance of domination: working for others.</p> <p>Skepticism about book learning & theoretical knowledge.</p> <p>Valuing practical expertise.</p>

Figure 1: Fordism’s Division of Labor and Economic Conditions, and Children’s Needs and Attitudes

<i>Schooling Reforms in Kettering</i>	
<i>Elementary</i>	
<i>Attitudes & Needs</i>	<i>Reforms</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resignation to failure. • Comfort in routine. • Tolerance of domination: working for others. • Ethos of equality, not 'top-down.' • Approval of conformity. • Valuing practical expertise. • Skepticism about book learning & theoretical knowledge. • Needs for food and rest. • Needs for attention and security. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removing the single axis of achievement. • Novelty. • Knowledge as discovered, not dispensed by authority. • Teacher as coach, not boss. • "All children can learn"-no one stands out. • Recognition of multiple abilities. • Practical, "hands-on, minds-on" projects. • "Learning can be fun." • Clean, predictable environment . • Free & reduced-price lunch. • Safe, cheerful environment. • Support, optimism. • Individual instruction.

Figure 2: How Children’s Needs and Attitudes are Met—and Challenged—by Schooling Reforms in Willow Run