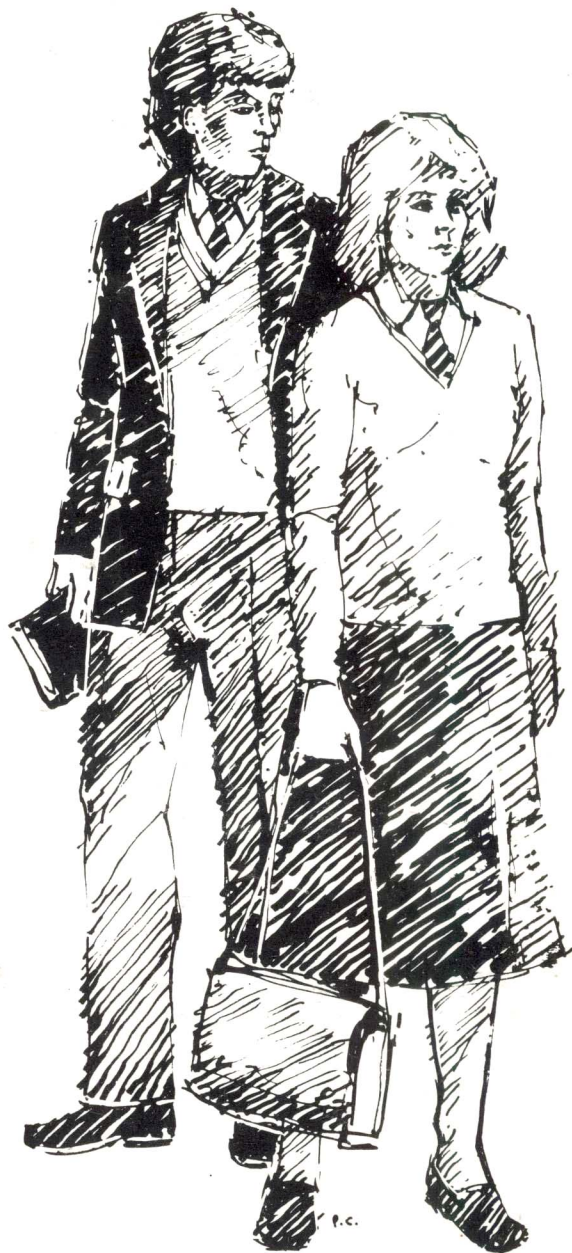# SCHOOLING IDEOLOGY & THE CURRICULUM

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Schooling, Ideology and the Curriculum

Edited
and Introduced by
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Schooling Ideology and the Curriculum

Preface

The papers which appear in this collection originate from presentations made by the authors at the Sociology of Education Conference held in January, 1980 at Westhill College, Birmingham.

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Introduction

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Although the different contributions to this book range over a wide spectrum of substantive issues, they share a common interest. This is a concern to explore the ways in which notions of the relations between theory and practice, between belief and action, can be used to develop three kinds of sensitivity in the sociology of education. A sensitivity towards how school systems are created, maintained and made to function. A sensitivity towards developing a more refined, critical and constructive awareness of the reliability and validity of descriptions, analyses and explanations offered in this field of study. And finally, a sensitivity towards the ways in which changes take place within the education system and how the insights and realisations generated in the discipline might be used to control such occurrences.

However, although there is a commonality of *focus*, this should not be taken to mean that the contributors are united in their attitudes to how the issues under consideration can be conceptualised or investigated. Much of the material in the book reflects a tension arising from different convictions about the nature of the perspective which will make the most useful contribution to the development of the sensitivities outlined. It is a tension both complex and creative. Complex because the notions of the dialectical relationship between theory and practice penetrate the discourse at various levels; at the level of how this relationship is manifested in schools, at the level of how analysis is to be conducted and, crucially, at the level of how the theory and practice of analysis can be related to the theory and practice of life in educational settings. Creative because it exposes contradictions between and within theories and practices at different levels and thus provides a basis for making a more developed sensitivity.

It can be argued that the development of critical insights in any intellectual endeavour depends upon the cross-fertilisation of ideas and evaluations and whilst the authors of the papers in this collection differ in some of their interpretations, an important aspect of their work is that frequently their particular stances are being developed through the process of a dialogue. To this extent, this collection

should be regarded as a contribution to a debate which is likely to continue for some time. This debate has a specific direction which distinguishes it from other avenues of thought which have been developed in the sociology of education. In the past, investigations of the theories on which education systems are predicated have often been conducted as if they were dealing with something quite separate from that which is being analysed by those studying the practices of individuals inside the system, and vice versa. A major contention, of the movement in which we can locate the discussions in this book, is that the sociology of education needs to be quite consciously concerned with the ways in which theories and practices inter-penetrate and with the extent and consequences of this inter-penetration or, more concisely, with ideology in education. Of course, as a concept, the notion 'ideology is not easy to define. Its usage in sociology ranges from those instances where it is employed to refer to the series of images that men use which are an expression of their consciousness of their world, to those other instances where it is used to refer to whole collections of beliefs used by various interest groups to legitimate and maintain their status positions within a hierarchical social order.[1] The movement in the sociology of education to which we refer is mostly concerned with the latter usage. It makes, as a priority, an exploration of how the structure of the education system and the nature of the everyday practices in schools are directly or indirectly related to the ways in which dominant groups in society attempt to secure acceptance and conformity to their beliefs, attitudes and interests. To this extent this approach quite deliberately and adamantly seeks to move away from a position in which questions about the relationship between theory and practice in both educational analysis and actuality are treated as a-political towards one from which the relation-ship between the distribution of power in society and educational processes is a major focus of inquiry.[2]

A legitimate question to pose is why a concern with the impact of ideologies in education, including questions of politics and power, should assume such an important place in current debate in the sociology of education? We believe this has arisen for several reasons. The first, and arguably the most fundamental reason, relates to what we would describe as a sense of despondency which seems to have been felt by many engaged in sociological examinations of education and schooling. For the most part, this mood sprang from a belief that reformist policy prescriptions and action, aimed at developing a more liberal educational system by making use of insights gained from sociological analysis, had largely failed. This sense of failure is discussed by Reynolds and Sullivan in their paper in this book, and they assert:

> Educational policies have simply failed to attain their goals. Greatly increased levels of educational expenditure have clearly not been associated with any noticeable reduction in inequalities between the members of social classes in their benefit from their system in their obtained qualifications. The proportion of students from working class homes within the higher education sector, for example, has remained at around 25–27 per cent in spite of the large overall expansion in the total numbers obtaining higher education ...

If increases in the overall quality of resources have not brought social justice for disadvantaged groups, neither have they brought the higher levels of economic growth to those societies where such expansionist educational policies have been followed.

What gives this apparent lack of effectiveness a depressing quality is that the supposed increases in our awareness of how educational institutions work, which had been laboriously produced through analysis undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s, did not seem particularly helpful in attempts made to bring such processes into the more direct control of participants or policy-makers. Thus, the necessity to identify the nature and source of seemingly intractable elements of constraint at work, both upon and within education, became pressing and inevitably involved attempting to expose the ideological bed-rock upon which schooling is based and the connections this structural support might have with wider socio-political frameworks.

However, the mood of despondency can also be seen as a reflection of a reaction to events experienced more directly by those working in the sociology of education – cut-backs in the provision for higher education leading to closures, amalgamations of institutions and falling student-rolls. The last few years have been characterised by anxiety, low-morale and fear as individuals working in higher education wondered if, during a period of educational contraction and economic recession, their personal involvement in the system would come under threat. The highly explicit intervention by the State into the lived-experience of sociologists of education or their colleagues confirmed the relevance of making as a priority the exploration of how educational institutions are controlled and the nature of the ideologies which enable and legitimate such control. Furthermore, this intervention was not restricted to the direct experience of individuals in higher education engaged in educational research or training but was also being perceived as a crucial aspect of the object of their works, the world of schools and teachers, and thus gave further support to the general feeling of anxiety and the consequent need for the rapid development of a form of analysis which could deal with questions of power and control. In short, the apparent powerlessness of individuals, at all levels of education, to defend themselves against forces who wished to implement policies with which they did not necessarily agree, sharpened the need felt to identify the nature and authority base of such forces and to isolate the mechanisms used to achieve and sustain the position of dominance from which they operated.

It can be argued that a second and different feature which contributed to the emergence of a greater emphasis being placed upon ideological questions in the study of education was what has been described as a 'paradigm crisis' in both sociology and the sociology of education. As the availability of a plurality of perspectives in sociology increased in the late 1960s and 1970s (an increase which was accompanied by vociferous claims being made by some exponents of different perspectives as to the indispensable contribution the approach they espoused could make to the advancement of social scientific endeavour), many practitioners were compelled to make careful consideration of the relationship between their

own research and teaching practices and the theoretical and political groundings on which these practices were based. It is interesting to note that some of these perspectives, themselves, were depressing in that they were predicated upon a deterministic view of social affairs which depicted the individual as powerless in the face of wider social forces. This, plus the proliferation of publications in which questions of *approach* were discussed and the complexity of the ideas and inter-pretations which were articulated during this period, added to the sense of frustration and bewilderment discussed above. More significantly, and perhaps paradoxically, conflict over where one's theoretical allegiance should be placed and, hence, the kind of practices which could be engaged in without contradicting the basic tenets of the particular theoretical position adopted, created the circumstances in which self-reflection was both necessary and consequential. Such self-reflection is both beneficial, in that it has led to sociologists of education making their own ideological position more explicit, and debilitating, in that it undermines the sense of sureness practitioners have for justifying these positions and their particular practices. This vulnerability has recently been exacerbated by an ideological attack mounted from sources external to the discipline. For example, in her paper in this collection, Janet Strivens explains that much of the work she describes in the paper has been developed, in part, as a reaction to this attack, a crucial dimension of which, she suggests, is illustrated in

> ... a recent trend in teacher education to reassess the role of theory in vocational training. The essential challenge is to the traditional status of the social sciences, questions being raised about the relevance of theoretical studies in the social sciences on courses where time is strictly limited and the first priority should be the acquisition of practical skills.

It is important to locate the kinds of troubles facing sociologists of education during recent years within a wider context of turbulence or what has been described as 'capitalism in crisis'.[3] Affairs like rampant inflation, high unemployment, low productivity and falling profits on the one hand, and experiments in political and economic management in the developing world on the other, have combined to produce a situation in which the organisation of economic life, the social relations related to this organisation and the appropriateness of the ideology which sustains and legitimates capitalist production become a public issue. The events which grew out of this crisis, in terms of reaction to it, involved increased intervention by dominant groups or their agents in social affairs. In education, the crushing ex-perience of contraction, school closures, efforts to relate the curriculum in school more closely to the 'needs' of industry, attempts at increased state monitoring of educational performance and efficiency (which brought with them a consequent up-heaval in the encounters and relations of numerous groups of people), was a stark testimony that politics and education were inextricably linked. Thus, in an atmosphere of private despondency and public crisis, it is not surprising that many sociologists should begin to express increasing interest in an analytical approach which, in making what seemed to be the sources of these troubles the focal point of investigation, offered a means which, even if it did not represent

the path to salvation, nevertheless appeared to be most useful in building some understanding of the situation.

However, what distinguishes the movement in the sociology of education we are describing is not just that it involves a concern with ideology and education *per se* but also the ways in which this concern have been translated into analysis. Although the relationship between patterns of education and wider ideological systems and practices has been made an area of analysis for some sociologists in the past,[4] the particular movement under consideration is characterised by a quite explicit interest in how power groups sustain and legitimise dominant ideologies and the impact these procedures have upon the form and content of educational life. This interest has been pursued along a variety of different lines. Bowles and Gintis, for example, in their influential book *Schooling in Capitalist America*,[5] maintain that we can advance our attempts to reveal the ideological basis of schooling and our understanding of the routine practices we find in schools by focussing our attention on ways in which social relations fostered in educational institutions are related to social relations in the economic and political order and the belief system which sustains these orders. Thus, they argue,

> The education system . . . reproduces and legitimates a pre-existing pattern in the process of training and stratifying the work force. How does this occur? The heart of the process is to be found not in the content of the educational encounter – or the process of information transfer – but in the form: the social relations of the educational encounter. These correspond closely to the social relations of dominance, subordination, and motivation in the economic sphere. Through the educational encounter, individuals are induced to accept the degree of powerlessness with which they will be faced as mature workers.[6]

Other writers have approached the issue differently. Rather than assuming a correspondence between the social relations of schooling and work, the ideological impact on education has been viewed by some in terms of how the ways in which knowledge and the curriculum is structured and defined in school serves to reproduce the cultural conditions of the prevailing economic and political order whilst others have made a concentration upon how the social system creates the necessary conditions for the emergence and development of cultural forms which stand in close, or distant, relation to the process of education and which condition the ideological expectations of those pupil and teachers immersed in such forms.

A diversity of approach, then, represents the present climate of debate about ideology and education. Whilst we would not claim that the analyses and descriptions presented in the papers collected in this volume are going to provide final answers or definitive statements on this issue, we do feel that they offer insights into how we can conceptualise the problem and, more importantly, make significant contributions to extending what we described as a sensitivity towards the possibilities of change. It would be arrogant to assume that we could successfully summarise the many different arguments contained in the various papers in this book. Nevertheless, we would like to isolate some elements from the papers which seem to us

to be the main issues which emerge from the collection *as a whole* and, in so-doing, to communicate some idea of why we have arranged the papers in the order in which they appear.

As we indicated at the beginning of this introduction, a major consideration addressed in this book is how sociologists of education might, by using concepts of ideology and politics, proceed in building an understanding of how institutionalised forms of education are to be related to other aspects of the social system in which these forms emerge and are maintained. An important point at issue here is the question of the acceptability of a particular theoretical position developed by Bowles and Gintis in which, as noted earlier, they suggest that one way of conceptualising this relationship is by exploring the ways in which the social relations of schooling might be perceived as being remarkably similar to the social relations of work – the correspondence theory. The first five papers in this volume all contain discussion relevant to a critical re-appraisal of the correspondence principle as it was first expressed or of how it has been applied to later work. The correspondence principle, as Gintis and Bowles themselves acknowledge, is open to the criticism that it represents the relation between education and the economy as a mostly harmonious one. In his paper, Apple, developing this criticism, argues that approaches using the theory will be limited unless we can establish not only that schools might be seen as reproducing the social relations of the prevailing socio-economic order and its dominant ideologies, but also *how* such reproduction is accomplished and whether or not this is *all* that schools do. He suggests that we have to recognise that teachers and pupils in school not only *take* forms of curriculum and organised knowledge which may well be predicated upon dominant ideologies as a basis for their activities, but that they also *work back* on these for their own ends. In being able to develop relatively autonomous ideologies within school – ideologies which are constructed as teachers and pupils react to their day-to-day, concrete lived-experiences and draw upon the contradictions of their own lives – individuals in schools are able to develop meanings and practices which stand in opposition to dominant versions and provide a basis for struggle against such formulations. To this extent schools *produce* ideologies as well as having them imposed upon them.

MacDonald's paper illustrates the kind of analysis which takes as its object the *content* of education and examines quite specifically how the processes of legitimation and reproduction occur – in this case the legitimation and reproduction of class and gender relations in schools. It can be argued that the essay represents an attempt to supplement the insights to be gained from the application of the correspondence theory by exploring how the ideologies of the dominant groups in capitalist society (or, as she calls them, the 'ruling class') penetrate and are reproduced in the structure and content of the school culture as realised in the curriculum. We do not think MacDonald's work is in direct opposition to the principles of the correspondence theory (although this is not to say her stance does not imply certain reservations about its present adequacy) but rather that, like Apple, she is interested in how reproduction 'gets done'. In highlighting how class and gender ideologies seem to be carried and transmitted in school texts and in suggesting methods by

which we can explore how teachers and pupils *receive or reject* such ideologies, she seeks to investigate how the relationship between education and the political-economic system can be conceptualised in less mechanistic ways.

Whilst, in their paper in this collection, Gintis and Bowles offer a number of self-criticisms of (their) earlier work, unlike some of the analyses we have considered so far, they defend this insistence that our main investigatory concern in attempting to discover the nature of the relationship between education and the political formation in which it is located must be directed towards the *form* educational arrangements and encounters take. They admit that a major weakness of the original version of the correspondence theory is that, if we assume a fairly unproblematic correspondence between schooling and the social order, it is difficult to account for those aspects of schooling which appear to stand in contradiction to dominant theories and practices. Yet, as they illustrate, such contradictions palpably exist and find forms of expression in school which would seem to pose quite direct threats to the legitimacy of the prevailing relations and mode of production. Therefore, in this paper, they offer a possible theoretical framework for coping with the capacity schooling has to reproduce patterns of social relations which both legitimate and contradict ideological conditions of the social totality. By using the notion of 'sites', that is, of cohesive areas of social life in which situationally relevant practices and rules are created, they seek to show that sets of rules governing social relations, which are quite different in terms of how basic concerns are defined, can be developed in three distinguishable areas of social experience – the state site, the family site and the site of production. The forms of discourse and the ideological rules employed in any of these sites *can be* different, depending on the history of that site. Gintis and Bowles argue that because education is located in close relation to two major sites in society, the state site and the site of production, the form it will take comes under two constraining influences. In capitalist society, education

> ... forms in general a subsystem of the state site, and therefore is directly subject to the principle of rights vested in persons. Second, education plays a central role in reproducing the political structure of the capitalist production process, which in turn is legitimated in terms of rights vested in property. Thus education is directly involved in the contradictory articulation of sites in advanced capitalism, and is expressed in terms of the property/person dichotomy: education reproduces rights vested in property, while itself organised in terms of rights vested in persons.

Of course, the extent to which this framework, which Gintis and Bowles offer, is directly applicable to the empirical conditions of schooling has yet to be substantially demonstrated. Interestingly, however, in their articles, both Edwards and Musgrave express some scepticism (although not of a disinterested nature) about the degree to which this requirement has been fulfilled with reference to the original version of the correspondence theory. Edwards argues that too often sociologists of education advance or accept sophisticated theorising too early and too easily in their analytical endeavour. As a result, it is either difficult to see what elements

of educational actuality one would need to consider to assess the central ideas proposed in the theory or, because some theories refer only to abstractions, there is a danger of neglecting the interpretative and reactive capacities of social actors. We are left with 'tidy' theories floating free from the reality of an 'untidy' world. Edwards maintains that we can learn from the practices of historians and could strengthen our analyses by working with the recognition that the validity of any 'theory', including the correspondence theory, depends just as much upon its *demonstrated* applicability to the nature and origin of the practices of the world it seeks to describe as it does on its internal consistency. Musgrave has a different critical interest. He raises the possibility that certain aspects of schooling are not explicable in terms of ideological constraints imposed upon schooling but rather, on the contrary, seem to be evidence of a *failure* of dominant groups to achieve lasting hegemony. He seeks ways of unravelling the causes of curriculum development and change and directs our attention to crises *embedded within schools* themselves as being crucial contributory features. Once school systems and practices are established, he maintains, they generate an internal dynamic and we would do well to consider how present practices arise as results of and reactions to the sustaining ideology of this dynamic, or to crises within it, before we move outside the situation in our search for sources of determination.

The points raised by both Edwards and Musgrave are not unrelated to what we identified as a second major consideration in the debate on ideology and education. This consideration is to do with the approaches we adopt and the conceptualisations we employ in attempting to delineate the strictly educational theories on which practices in school are based and the relationship between them; in short, the empirical instances of educational belief systems and action. Four papers in this book address this question by either referring to how the writers' own empirical research relates to these issues or by proposing certain models we might use to handle the problems involved more efficiently – those by Strivens, Chessum, Meighan and Brown, and Easthope.

The approach adopted by Strivens is characterised by a desire to formulate descriptions of beliefs and practices without losing touch with the interests and perceptions of teachers and student-teachers. Thus, she grounds her own research, which she describes in this paper, upon two fairly specific issues. First, the identification of those practices which give indication of the general ideology at work within a particular school. Second, a comparison of the differences between the ways in which forms of social relations, which provide the basis for these practices, are variously managed and legitimated in different schools. This procedure is important, she suggests, because the isolation of critical differences *between* schools provides a possible point from which we can begin to determine how contradictions arise within the total schooling process as broad educational ideologies are transformed into specific sets of educational practices. Chessum is also concerned with the differences between schools. However, her particular interest is in how teachers in different institutions explain and justify their conceptualisations and actions when confronted by pupils who present 'problems' to them. She describes how the empirical work she has undertaken provides some reasons for assuming that

teachers in different schools generate different theories and practices which are, in part, explicable through reference to the local, institutionalised context and established ideologies. Where such ideologies are institutionally well-defined and cohesive, reactions to 'problem' pupils were based upon a core belief system; where they were institutionally indistinct or weakly enforced by senior management, reactions were based upon more pragmatic considerations, that is, teachers would support those positions adopted towards 'problem' pupils which proved effective in 'containing' forms of resistance. The general point, then, raised in discussion developed in both these papers, is that we need to be alert to the possibility that schools have relative autonomy in *certain* areas which may well lessen their effectiveness as agencies of reproduction.

Interesting alternatives to attempts to develop our understanding of the relationship between ideology and education at the empirical level are provided in the papers by Meighan and Brown and by Easthope. Rather than confining their analysis to the beliefs and practices operating in *schooling*, the writers of both these papers offer a means by which we can reflect upon such ideologies by comparing them with the ideological foundations of educational settings which are different from traditional schooling arrangements. Both papers reveal the importance which the setting of an education form has for the kinds of practices it promotes and the belief systems used to organise and legitimate these practices. Meighan and Brown, using a model which attempts to draw together the crucial concerns of a series of endeavours to isolate core elements of educational ideologies, distinguish some central charateristics of an educational movement which has been set-up in opposition to the dominant school system. Education Otherwise, a movement organised by parents who wish to exercise their right to have their children educated in places other than school, mostly frequently in the home. They suggest that *where* education takes place, its socio-geographic or physical location, can be seen as just as important a factor in determining the nature and consequences of the experience as other features of its organisation which provide the ideological shape of the activity. Easthope uses the term 'setting' somewhat differently. He develops a model of ideal types of 'settings' in which forms of education take place. What distinguishes a type, for him, is the forms of social relations nurtured or made possible in the curriculum established by the particular agency which has control of the setting in which education is taking place. By contrasting the social relationships promoted or inhibited by the curricula processes in 'communal resocialising agencies' (for example, drug rehabilitation centres), apprenticeship schemes and schools, he seeks to focus upon how personal identities are created or changed in such different settings. He argues that the impact the beliefs and social relations encapsulated in the curricula of these formations have upon 'learners' are at least as influential as the social relations which typify direct inter-personal relations within these settings.

Although the four papers introduced above offer different and sometimes competing interpretations of aspects of the empirical conditions of the relationship between ideology, schooling and the curriculum, they all illustrate an important point to be established in the general debate. It is the point made by Edwards

when he concludes that some theories about this relationship

> . . . may seem a realistic appreciation of compelling 'external' constraints, or an over-determined view which exceeds the evidence currently available. The issue is the most important facing the sociology of education, but it will not be resolved by exchanges of speculation. Marc Bloch's final words on the historian's craft are no less applicable to the practice of sociology – 'the causes cannot be assumed, they are to be looked for'.

At the beginning of this introduction we alluded to a sense of frustration as a feature of the climate which made an exploration of ideology and education an attractive proposition to sociologists of education. We will conclude by suggesting that the ways this exploration is developing provides some grounds for adopting a more optimistic view. Greater understanding of either the ideological constraints upon the education system or of the ways in which practices in schools can be demonstrated as drawing upon (or resisting) the tenets of a distinguishable belief system, provides a means for intervention. In one way or another, the writers of all the papers in this book express a desire for change. However, the last paper in this volume, by Reynolds and Sullivan, addresses the problems of justifying this desire and of making proposals for satisfying it. Whilst the various prescriptions suggested in this paper might not represent the consensus view in sociology of education, one of the issues Reynolds and Sullivan raise – that sociologists of education must come to terms with the relationship between their own beliefs and practices – is of fundamental importance. Their paper, by identifying the particular ideological associations which have provided the impetus for practices within sociology of education at various stages of its development and by isolating some of the consequences of these associations, helps locate the struggle for change within an historical perspective. It seems to us that sociologists of education have an obligation to present not only possible strategies for intervention in education but also the assumptions and beliefs upon which such suggestions are based. This book is intended as a contribution to debate on how both these obligations might be fulfilled.

Notes and References

1 This distinction is taken from GIDDENS, A. (1979) *Central Problems in Social Theory,* London, Macmillan.
2 See, for example, the discussions presented in YOUNG, M. and WHITTY, G. (1977) *Society, State and Schooling,* Barcombe, Falmer Press.
3 GAMBLE, A. and WALTON, P. (1976) *Capitalism in Crisis,* London, Macmillan.
4 See, for example, HALSEY, A.H., FLOUD, J. and ANDERSON, C.A. (Eds.) (1961) *Education, Economy and Society,* Glencoe III, Free Press. HOPPER, E. (Ed.) (1971) *Readings in the Theory of Educational Systems,* London, Hutchinson, 1971.
5 BOWLES, S. and GINTIS, H. (1976) *Schooling in Capitalist America,* London, RKP.
6 *Ibid.,* p. 265

Curricular Form and the Logic of Technical Control: Building the Possessive Individual.

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Corporate Ideologies: Reaching the Teacher

It does not require an exceptional amount of insight to see the current attempts by the state and industry to bring schools more closely into line with 'economic needs'. Neither side of the Atlantic has been immune to these pressures. In the UK, The Great Debate and the Green Paper stand as remarkable statements to the ability of capital in times of economic crisis to marshall its forces. As the Green Paper notes:

> There is a wide gap between the world of education and the world of work. Boys and girls are not sufficiently aware of the importance of industry to our society, and they are not taught much about it.[1]

It goes on, making the criterion of functional efficiency the prime element in educational policy.

> The total resources which will be available for education and the social services in the future will depend largely on the success of the Industrial Strategy. It is vital to Britain's economic recovery and standard of living that the performance of manufacturing industry is improved and that the whole range of Government policies, including education, contribute as much as possible to improving industrial performance and thereby increasing the national wealth.[2]

In the United States, where governmental policies are more highly mediated by a different articulation between the state, the economy, and schools, this kind of pressure exists in powerful ways as well. Often the workings of industry are even more visible. Chairs of Free Enterprise devoted to economic education are springing up at universities throughout the country. Teaching the message of industry has become a real force. Let me give one example taken from what is known as the Ryerson Plan, a corporate plan to have teachers spend their summers working