

Against Schooling: Education and Social Class

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“..the crisis in American education, on the one hand, announces the bankruptcy of progressive education and, on the other hand, presents a problem of immense difficulty because it has arisen under the conditions and in response to the demands of a mass society” Hannah Arendt, 1961)

Introduction

Americans have great expectations of their schools. We tend to invest them with the primary responsibility for providing our children with the means by which they may succeed in an increasingly uncertain workworld. More, if the child “fails” to be inducted, through academic discipline, into the rituals of labor-- we blame teachers and school administrators. Indirectly schools have been burdened with addressing many of the world’s ills. Along with two world wars, and revolutions, the 20th century witnessed great hopes for democracy but experienced its demise in the wake of the rise of the dictatorships. We knew that education was the key to technological transformation which became the main engine of economic growth. Schooling was a bulwark of secularism but has buckled under the onslaught produced by the revival of religious fundamentalism. And in almost every economically “developed” country we count on schools to smooth the transition of huge populations from rural to urban habitats, from “foreign” languages and cultures to English and Americanism.

At the dawn of the new century no American institution is invested with a greater role to bring the young and their parents into the modernist regime than public schools. The common school is charged with the task of preparing children and youth for their dual responsibilities to the social order: citizenship and, perhaps its primary task, learning to labor. On the one hand, in the older curriculum on the road to citizenship in a democratic, secular society schools are supposed to transmit the jewels of the enlightenment, especially literature and science. On the other, students are to be prepared for work-world by means of a loose, but definite stress on the redemptive value of work, the importance of family and, of course, the imperative of love and loyalty to one’s country. As to the enlightenment’s concept of citizenship students are, at least putatively, encouraged to engage in independent, critical thinking.

But the socializing functions of schooling play to the opposite idea: children of the working and professional and middle classes are to be molded to the industrial and technological imperatives of contemporary society. Students learn science and mathematics, not as a discourse of liberation from myth and religious superstition, but as a series of algorithms the mastery of which are presumed to improve the student’s logical capacities, or with no aim other than fulfilling academic requirements. In most places the social studies do not emphasize the choices between authoritarian and democratic forms of social organization, or democratic values, particularly criticism and renewal, but as bits of information that have little significance for the conduct of life. Perhaps the

teaching and learning of world literature where some students are inspired by the power of the story to, in John Dewey's terms "reconstruct" experience is a partial exception to the rule that for most students high school is endured rather than experienced as a series of exciting explorations of self and society.(Dewey, 1980)

In the wake of these awesome tasks fiscal exigency as well as a changing mission have combined to leave public education in the United States in a chronic state of crisis. For some the main issue is whether schools are failing to transmit the general intellectual culture, even to the most able students. What is at stake in this critique is the fate of America as a civilization, particularly the condition of its democratic institutions and the citizens who are, in the final analysis, responsible for maintaining them. Hannah Arendt goes so far as to ask whether we "love the world" and our children enough to devise an educational system capable of transmitting to them the salient cultural traditions. Other critics complain schools are failing working class students, black, Latino and white, to fulfill the promise of equality of opportunity for good jobs.. While they are concerned to address the class bias of schooling they unwittingly reinforce it by ignoring its content. The two positions, both with respect to their goals and to their implied educational philosophies, may not necessarily be contradictory but their simultaneous enunciation produces considerable tension for, with exceptions to be discussed below, the American workplace has virtually no room for dissent and individual or collective initiative not sanctioned by management. The corporate factory, which includes sites of goods and symbolic production alike, is perhaps the nation's most authoritarian institution. But any reasonable concept of democratic citizenship requires an individual who is able to discern knowledge from propaganda, is competent to choose among conflictual claims and programs and is capable of actively participating in the affairs of the polity. Yet the political system offers few opportunities, beyond the ritual of voting, for active citizen participation.(Arendt,1961)

Even identifying the problem of why and how schools fail has proven to be controversial.For those who would define mass education as a form of training for the contemporary workplace, the problem can be traced to the crisis of authority, particularly school authority. That some of the same educational analysts favor a curriculum that stresses critical thinking for a small number of students in a restricted number of sites is consistent with the dominant trends of schooling since the turn of the 21st century. In their quest to restore authority conservative educational policy has forcefully caused schools to abandon, both rhetorically and practically, the so-called "child-centered" curriculum and pedagogy in favor of a series of measures that not only hold students accountable for passing standardized tests and for a definite quantity of school knowledge on penalty of being left back from promotion or expelled, but also impose performance-based criteria on administrators and teachers. For example in New York City the schools chancellor has issued "report cards" to principals and has threatened to fire those whose schools do not meet standards established by high stakes tests. These tests are the antithesis of critical thought. Their precise object is to evaluate the student's ability to imbibe and regurgitate information and to solve problems according to prescribed algorithms.

On the other side the progressives, who misread John Dewey's educational philosophy to mean that the past need not be studied too seriously, have offered little resistance to the gradual vocationalizing, and dumming down of the mass education curriculum. In fact, historically they were advocates of making the curriculum less formal, reducing requirements and, on the basis of a degraded argument that children learn best by "doing", promoted practical, work-oriented programs for high school students. Curricular deformatization was often justified on interdisciplinary criteria, which resulted in watering-down of course content and demphasizing writing. Most American high school students, in the affluent as well as the "inner city" districts, may write short papers which amount to book reviews and autobiographical essays, but most graduate without ever having to perform research and write a paper of considerable length. Moreover, in an attempt to make the study of history more "relevant" to students' lives, since the late 1960s the student is no longer required to memorize dates; he may have learned the narratives but was often unable to place them in a specific chronological context. Similarly economics has been eliminated in many schools or taught as a "unit" of a general social studies course. And if philosophy is taught at all, it is construed in terms of "values clarification", a kind of ethics in which the student is assisted to discover and examine her own values.

That after more than a century of universal schooling the relationship between education and class has once more been thrust to the forefront is just one more signal of the crisis in American education. The educational left, never strong on promoting intellectual knowledge as a substantive demand, clings to one of the crucial precepts of progressive educational philosophy: under the sign of egalitarianism, the idea that class deficits can be overcome by equalizing access to school opportunities without questioning what those opportunities have to do with genuine education. The access question has been in the forefront of higher education debates since the early 1970s; even conservatives who favor vouchers and other forms of public funding for private and parochial schools have justified privatizing instruction on access grounds..

The structure of schooling already embodies the class system of society and, for this reason, the access debate is mired in a web of misplaced concreteness. To gain entrance into schools always entails placement into that system. "Equality of Opportunity" for class mobility is the system's tacit recognition that inequality is normative. In the system of mass education schools are no longer constituted to transmit the enlightenment intellectual traditions or the fundamental prerequisites of participatory citizenship, even for a substantial minority. While acquiring credentials that are conferred by schools remains an important prerequisite for many occupations, the conflation of schooling with education is mistaken. Schooling is surely a source of training both by its disciplinary regime and its credentialing system. But schools transmit not a "love for the world" or "for our children" as Arendt suggests and, contrary to their democratic pretensions, teach conformity to the social, cultural and occupational hierarchy. In our contemporary world they are not constituted to foster independent thought, let alone encourage independence of thought and action. School knowledge is not the only source of education for students, perhaps not even the most important source.

On the contrary, in black and Latino working class districts, schools are, for many students, way stations to the military or to prison even more to the civilian paid labor force. As Michelle Fine observes: “visit a South Bronx high school these days and you’ll find yourself surrounded by propaganda from the army/navy and marines...look at the “stats” and you’ll see that 70% of the men and women in prison have neither a GED or a diploma;go to Ocean Hill- Brownsville 40ish years later, and you” see a juvenile justice facility on the very site that they wanted to a build their own schools”.(personal communication with the author). In the current fiscal crisis afflicting education and other social services there is an outstanding exception: prisons continue to be well-funded and despite the decline of violent crimes in the cities, drug busts keep prisons full and rural communities working.

Young people learn, for ill as well as good, from popular culture, especially music, from parents and family structure, and perhaps most important, from their peers. Schools are the stand in for “society”, the aggregation of individuals who, by contract or by coercion, are subject to governing authorities in return for which they may be admitted into the world albeit on the basis of different degrees of reward. To the extent they signify solidarity and embody common dreams popular culture, parents, and peers are the worlds of quasi-communities which are more powerful influences on their members.

Access to What?.

In the main the critique of education has been directed to the question of access its entailments particularly the credentials that presumably open up the gates to the higher learning or to better jobs. Generally speaking, critical education analysis focuses on the degree to which schools are willing and able to open their doors to working class students, because through their mechanisms of differential access, schools are viewed as, perhaps, the principal reproductive institutions of economically and technologically advanced capitalist societies. With some exceptions most critics of schooling have paid scant attention to school authority, the conditions for the accumulation of social capital—the intricate network of personal relations that articulate with occupational access--, and to cultural capital—the accumulation of the signs, if not the substance, of kinds of knowledge that are markers of distinction.

The progressives assume that the heart of the class question is whether schooling provides working class kids equality of opportunity to acquire legitimate knowledge and marketable academic credentials. They have adduced overwhelming evidence that contradicts schooling’s reigning doctrine: that despite class, race, or gender hierarchies in the economic and political system, public education provides every individual with the tools to overcome conditions of birth. In reality only about a quarter of people of working class origin attain professional, technical and managerial careers through the credentialing system. They find occupational niches, but not at the top of their respective domains. Typically graduating from third tier, non- research colleges and universities their training does not entail acquiring knowledge connected with substantial intellectual work: theory, extensive writing and independent research. Students leaving these institutions find jobs as line supervisors, computer technicians, teachers, nurses, social workers and other niches in the social service professions.

A small number may join their better educated colleagues in getting no collar jobs, where “no collar”—Andrew Ross’s term-- designates occupations which afford considerable work autonomy, such as computer design, which, although salaried, cannot be comfortably folded into the conventional division of manual and intellectual labor. That so-called social mobility, was a product of the specific conditions of American economic development at a particular time—the first quarter of the 20th century-- and was due, principally, to the absence of an indigenous peasantry during its industrial revolution and the forced confinement of millions of blacks to southern agricultural lands—is conveniently forgotten or ignored by consensus opinion. Nor were the labor shortages provoked by World War Two and the subsequent US dominance of world capitalism until 1973 taken into account by the celebrants of mobility. Economic stagnation has afflicted the United States economy for more than three decades and, despite the well-known high-tech bubble of the 1990s, its position has deteriorated in the world market. Yet, the mythology of mobility retains a powerful grip over the popular mind. That schooling makes credentials available to anyone regardless of rank or status, forms one of the sturdy pillars of American ideology. (Ross 2003)

In recent years the constitutional and legal assignment to the states and local communities of responsibility for public education has been undermined by what has been termed the “standards” movement which is today the prevailing national educational policy, enforced not so much by federal law as by political and ideological coercion. At the state and district levels the invocation to “tough love” has attained widespread support. We are witnessing the abrogation, both in practice and in rhetoric, of the tradition of social promotion whereby students moved through the system without acquiring academic skills. Having proven unable to provide to most working class kids the necessary educational experiences that qualify them for academic promotion, after more than decade after its installation, the standards movement reveals its underlying content: it is the latest means of exclusion whose success depends on placing the onus for failure to achieve academic credentials on the individual rather than the system. Although state departments of education frequently mandate certain subjects be taught in every school and have established standards based on high stakes tests applicable to all districts, everyone knows that districts with working-class majorities provide neither a curriculum and pedagogy nor facilities which meet these standards because, among other problems, they are chronically underfunded. But there is no shortage of money for the private corporations who are making huge profits on school systems High stakes testing, a form of privatization, transfers huge amounts of public money to publishers, testing organizations and large consulting companies. The state aid formulae which, since the advent of conservative policy hegemony, reward those districts whose students perform well on high stakes standardized tests, tend to be unequal. Performance based aid policies means that school districts where the affluent live get more than their share, and make up for state budget deficits by raising local property taxes and soliciting annual subventions from parents, measures not affordable by even the top layer of wage-workers, and low-level salaried employees. The result is overcrowded classrooms, poor facilities, especially libraries, and underpaid, often poorly prepared teachers, an outcome of financially- starved education schools in public universities.

Standards presuppose students' prior possession of cultural capital,—an acquisition which almost invariably entails having been reared in a professional or otherwise upper class family. That, in the main, even the most privileged elementary and secondary schools are ill-equipped to compensate for home backgrounds in which reading and writing are virtually absent, has become a matter of indifference for school authorities. In this era of social darwinism poor school performance is likely to be coded as genetic deficit rather than being ascribed to social policy. Of course the idea that working-class kids, whatever their gender, race or ethnic backgrounds, were selected by evolution or by God, to perform material rather than immaterial labor is not new; this view is as old as class divided societies. But in an epoch in which the chances of obtaining a good working class job have sharply diminished, most kids face dire consequences if they don't acquire the skills needed in the world of immaterial labor. Not only are 75% assigned to working class jobs but in the absence of a shrinking pool of unionized industrial jobs, which often pay more than some professions such as teaching and social work, they must accept low-paying service sector employment, enter the informal economy, or join the ranks of the chronically unemployed.

From 1890-1920, the greatest period of social protest in American history before the industrial union upsurge of the 1930s John Dewey, the leading educational philosopher of the progressive era, decisively transformed class discourse about education into a discourse of class-leveling. Dewey's philosophy of education is a brilliant piece of bricolage: it combines an acute sensitivity to the prevailing inequalities in society with a pluralist theory which, by definition, excludes class struggles as a strategy for achieving democracy. It was a feat that could have been achieved only by tapping into the prevailing radical critique of the limits of American democracy. But Dewey's aim was far from founding a new educational or political radicalism. True to the pragmatist tradition of "tinkering" rather than transforming institutions, Dewey sought to heal the breach between labor and capital through schooling. To the extent schools afforded workers' children access to genuine education, American democracy—and the Americanization of waves of new immigrants—would be secure.

Dewey was not only America's pre-eminent philosopher, he was a major intellectual spokesperson of the progressive movement at a time when social reform had achieved high visibility and had enormous influence over both legislation and public opinion, principally among wide sections of the middle class as well as in the higher circles of power. Not only did his writings help bring education into the center of intellectual and political discourse by arguing that a society that wished to overcome the stigma of class distinction associated with industrial capitalism had to fervently embrace universal schooling. He was able to elaborate the doctrine that schooling was the heart of education, the core institution for the reproduction of liberal-democratic society, and the basis for the objective of class leveling. In the end "democracy in education" signifies that by means of universal schooling all children, regardless of class origins, could have access to social mobility. Which is not egalitarian at all.

Democracy and Education (1916), Dewey's main philosophical statement on education may be viewed in the context of the turn of the 20th century emergence of mass public education which, among other goals, was designed to address a multitude of problems that accompanied the advent of industrial society and the emergence of the United States as a world power: the enormous task of "Americanizing"—ideological education—millions of immigrants' children, most of whom were of the working class; the rise of scientifically-based industrial and commercial technologies that, in the service of capital, required a certain level of verbal, scientific, and mathematical literacy of a substantial portion of the wage-labor force; and the hard-won recognition by economic and political authorities as well as the labor movement that child labor had deleterious consequences for the future of the capitalist system and, in an era of rapid technological change, the fact that industrial labor had become relatively expendable. In this context the high school became an important ageing vat or warehouse, whether adolescents learned anything or not. As Michael B. Katz has shown this latter concern was the basis of the public education movement in the 19th century the question for educators, law enforcement officials and political and economic leaders was what to do with unemployed youth during the day. The day-prison was one solution but Horace Mann prevailed upon his colleagues to establish public schools as a more "productive" way of containing unruly youngsters. Later the institution was expanded from six to twelve grades and the minimum age for leaving rose from twelve to sixteen. After a century of compulsory secondary schooling, the educational value of high schools is still in doubt (Katz, 1970)

At the outset, Dewey specifies the purposes of education: through adult transmission and communication to assist the young to direct their own lives. Dewey cautions adults that, since the young hold in their hands society's future, the nature of their transmissions inevitably have serious consequences. Yet, having recognized, briefly, the role of "informal" education in the self-formation of the young, Dewey establishes the rule for virtually all subsequent educational philosophy. Consistent with a liberal democratic society educators are admonished to devise a formal method for directing the future: by organization of a common school that provides the necessary discipline, array of learnings and methods by which learning that reproduces the social order, may occur. While transmitting and communicating knowledge are intended to provide "meaning to experience", and Dewey invokes "democratic criteria" as the basis for his concept of the "reconstruction of experience", the objective of "control and growth" in order to achieve "social continuity" occupies an equally important place in any educational enterprise to the creative possibilities of education. (Dewey, 1980, 331).

Dewey walks a tightrope between the creative side of education as a playful and imaginative reflection on experience and the necessary task of reproducing the social order in which work, albeit as much as possible creative, remains the key educational goal. But he also endorses the role of the school for training the labor force. Dewey advocated for the ability of children to obtain the knowledge that could aid in their quest for an autonomous future even as he approached the problem of moral education (character building, values) from the perspective of society's need to reproduce itself on the basis of the criteria inherited from the past. He deplores the separation of labor and leisure, the cleavage of liberal arts and vocational education in which the

former is regarded as activity to be tolerated but not enjoyed. Labor should not be viewed as a “job” but as much as possible, a “calling”. Without addressing the nature of the rationalized labor to which wage workers, including most professional and technical workers are subjected, Dewey’s educational philosophy is directed mostly to the ideal of educational humanism. Class distinctions are not denied but are assumed to be blurred, if not eliminated, by democratic education.

In both its critical and celebratory variants of his philosophy Dewey’s intellectual children have not, with few exceptions, addressed the issue of whether, given its conflictual purposes and hierarchical organization, schools can fulfill its liberal-democratic, let alone egalitarian promise. Having narrowly confined itself to school practices, post-Deweyan progressive educational thought has recoded his philosophy by invoking phrases such as “self-realization” and “child centered” to describe education’s goals. Or worse, Dewey has been used to justify a relentless instrumentalism in curriculum design: in the name of anti-traditionalism and nationalism high schools do not teach philosophy, social history—principally the role of social movements in making history—or treat world literature as a legitimate object of academic study. Needless to say few, if any, critics have challenged the curricular exclusions of working class history, let alone the histories of women and of blacks. Nor have curricular critics addressed the exclusion of philosophy and social theory.

In recent years the philosophy of education has waned and been replaced by a series of policy-oriented empirical research projects that conflate democracy with access, and openly subordinate school knowledge to the priorities of the state and the corporations. Educational thought has lost, even renounced, Dewey’s program directed to the reconstruction of experience. In fact, after the early grades student experience is viewed by many educators and administrators with suspicion, even hostility. Recent educational policy has veered towards delineating pre-school and kindergarten as sites for academic and vocational preparation. If the child is to grow to become a productive member of society—where productive is equated with work-ready—, play must be directed, free time severely constrained. The message emanating from school authorities is to “forget” all other forms and sites of learning. Academic and technical knowledge become the only legitimate forms, and the school is the only reliable site. Whatever its defects, in contrast to the penchant of modern educational researchers to focus on “policy” to the detriment of historical and theoretical analysis, Dewey’s ideas demonstrate a passion for citizenship and ambivalence about the subordination of education to the imperatives of the system: he deplored the subordination of knowledge to the priorities of the state while, at the same time, extolling the virtues of the liberal state; he subjected vocational education to the scrutiny of the enlightenment prescription that education be critical of the existing state of affairs, while approving the reproductive function of schools.

The rise of higher education since world war two has been seen by many as a repudiation of academic elitism. Do not the booming higher education enrollments validate the propositions of social mobility and democratic education? Not at all. Rather than constituting a sign of rising qualifications and widening opportunity, burgeoning college and university enrollments signify changing economic and political trends. The scientific

and technical nature of our production and service sectors increasing require qualified and credentialed workers(it would be a mistake to regard them as identical). Students who would have sought good factory jobs in the past now believe, with reason, they need credentials to qualify for a good-paying job. On the other hand even as politicians and educators decry social promotion, and most high schools with working-class constituencies remain ageing vats, mass higher education is, to a great extent, a holding pen by effectively masking unemployment and underemployment Which may account for its rapid expansion over the last thirty five years of chronic economic stagnation, deindustrialization and the proliferation of part-time and temporary jobs, largely in the low-paid service sectors. Consequently working-class students are able, even encouraged, to enter universities and colleges at the bottom of the academic hierarchy— community colleges but also public four year colleges-- thus fulfilling the formal pledge of equal opportunity for class mobility even as most of these institutions suppress its content. But grade- point averages which, in the standards era depend as much as the Scholastic Aptitude Test on high stakes testing, measure the student's acquired knowledge, and restrict her access to elite institutions of higher learning, the obligatory training grounds for professional and managerial occupations. Since all credentials are not equal graduating from third and fourth tier institutions does not confer on the successful candidate the prerequisites for entering a leading graduate school—the preparatory institution for professional/managerial occupations, or the the most desirable entry level service jobs which require only a bachelor's degree.(Aronowitz,2000)

Pierre Bourdieu argues that schools reproduce class relations by reinforcing rather than reducing class-based differential access to social and cultural capital, key markers of class affiliation and mobility. These forms of capital, he argues, are always already possessed by children of the wealthy, professionals, and the intelligensia. Far from making possible a rich intellectual education, or providing the chance to affiliate with networks of students and faculty who have handles on better jobs, through mechanisms of discipline and punishment, schooling habituates working-class students to the bottom rungs of the work world, or the academic world, by subordinating or expelling them.(Bourdieu and Passeron 1979)Poorly prepared for academic work by their primary and secondary schools, and having few alternatives to acquiring some kind of credential, many who stay the course and graduate high school and third and fourth tier college, inevitably confront a series of severely limited occupational choices—or none at all. Their life chances are just a cut above those who do not complete high school or college.Their school performances seem to validate what what commonsense has always suspected: given equal opportunity to attain school knowledge, the cream always rises to the top and those stuck at the bottom must be biologically impaired or victimized by the infamous “culture of poverty”. That most working class high school and college students are obliged to hold full or part-time jobs in order to stay in school fails to temper this judgement for as is well known, preconceptions usually trump facts.(cicourel,1963). Nor does the fact that children of the recent 20 million immigrants from Latin America and Asia, speak their native languages at home, in the neighborhood and to each other in school evoke more than hand-ringing from educational leaders; in this era of tight school budgets English as a second language funds have been cut or eliminated at every level of schooling

But Paul Willis insists that working class kids get working class jobs by means of their refusal to accept the discipline entailed in curricular mastery and by their rebellion against school authority. Challenging the familiar “socialization” thesis, of which Bourdieu’s is perhaps the most sophisticated version, according to which working class kids “fail” because they are culturally deprived or, in the American critical version, are assaulted by the hidden curriculum and school pedagogy which subsumes kids under the prevailing order, Willis recodes kids’ failure as refusal of [school] work. (Willis 1981). Which lands them in the factory or low level service jobs. Willis offers no alternative educational model to schooling: his discovery functions as critique. Indeed, as Willis himself acknowledges the school remains, in Louis Althusser’s famous phrase, the main “ideological state apparatus”, but working class kids are not victims. Implicitly rejecting Sennett and Cobb’s notion that school failure is a “hidden injury” of class insofar as working class kids internalize poor school performance as a sign of personal deficit, he argues that most early school leavers are active agents in the production of their own class position (Althusser, 1971); (Sennett and Cobb, 1973) While students’ antipathy to school authority is enacted at the site of the school, its origins are the working class culture from which they spring. Workers do not like bosses and kids do not like school bosses, the deans and principals, but often as well the teachers, whose main job in the urban centers is to keep order. The source of working class kids’ education is not the school but the shop-floor, where their parents work, the home and the neighborhood. About this more below.

In the past half century the class question has been inflected by race and gender discrimination and, in the American way, the “race, gender, class” phrase implies that these domains are ontologically distinct, if not entirely separate. Nor have they theorized the race and gender question as a class issue, but as an attribute of bio-identities. In fact in the era of identity politics class itself stands alongside race and gender as just another identity. Having made the easy, inaccurate, judgement that white students, regardless of their class or gender stand in a qualitatively different relation to school-related opportunities than blacks, class is often suppressed as a sign of exclusion. (fn on the distinction between qualitative and quantitative measures) In privileging issues of access, not only is the curriculum presupposed, in which case Bourdieu’s insistence on the concept of cultural capital is ignored, but also the entire question is ellided of whether schooling may be conflated with education. Only rarely do writers examine other forms of education. In both the marxist and liberal traditions schooling is presumed to remain, over a vast spectrum of spatial and temporal situations, the theatre within which life chances are determined.

Education and Immaterial Labor

Education may be defined as the collective and individual reflection on the totality of life experiences: what we learn from peers, parents and the socially situated cultures of which they are a part, media, and schools. By reflection I mean the transformation of experience into a multitude of concepts that constitute the abstractions we call “knowledge”. Which

of the forms of learning predominate are always configured historically. The exclusive focus by theorists and researchers on school knowledge—indeed the implication that school is the principal site of what we mean by education-- reflects the degree to which they have, themselves, internalized the equation of education with school knowledge and its preconditions. The key learning is they(we) have been habituated to a specific regime of intellectual labor which entails a high level of self-discipline, the acquisition of the skills of reading and writing, and the career expectations associated with professionalization.

To say this constitutes the self-reflection by intellectuals-- in the broadest sense of the term --of their own relation to schooling. In the age of the decline of critical intelligence and the proliferation of technical intelligence “intellectual” in its current connotation, designates immaterial labor, not primarily those engaged in traditional intellectual pursuits such as literature, philosophy and art.. Immaterial labor describes those who work not with objects or administration of things and people, but with ideas, symbols and signs. Some of the occupations grouped under immaterial labor have an affective dimension, particularly people who, in one way or another, care for each other. The work demands the complete subordination of brain, emotion and body to the task, while requiring the worker to exercise considerable judgement and imagination in its performance.(hardt and.negri,1994) At sites such as “new economy” private-sector software workplaces, some law firms that deal with questions of intellectual property, public interest, constitutional and international law, research universities and independent research institutes and small, innovative design, architectural and engineering firms, the informality of the labor process, close collaborative relationships among members of task-oriented teams, the overflow of the space of the shop floor with the spaces of home and play, evoke, at times, a high level of exhilaration, even giddiness among members.(. Ross 2003) But these relationships are present in such work as teaching, child care, care for seniors and the whole array of therapeutic services, including psychotherapy.

To be an immaterial worker means, in the interest of having self-generated work, surrendering much of her unfettered time. They are obliged to sunder the conventional separation of work and leisure, to adopt the view that time devoted to creative, albeit commodified labor, is actually “free”. Or, to be more exact, even play must be engaged in as serious business. For many the golf course, the bar, the weekend at the beach are work places, where dreams are shared, plans formulated, and deals are made..Just as time becomes unified around work, so work losses its geographic specificity. As Andrew Ross shows in his pathbreaking ethnography of a New York new economy workplace during, and after the dot.com boom, the headiness for the pioneers of this new work world was, tacitly, a function of the halycon period of the computer software industry when everyone felt the sky was no longer the limit. When the economic crunch descended on thousands of workplaces, people were laid off and those who remained experienced a heavy dose of market reality.

It may be argued that among elite students and institutions schooling not only prepares immaterial labor by transmitting a bundle of legitimate knowledge; the diligent, academically successful student internalizes the blur between the classroom, play and the

home by spending a great deal of time in the library or ostensibly playing at the computer. Thus the price of the promise of autonomy, a situation that is intrinsic to professional ideology, if not always its practice in the context of bureaucratic and hierarchical corporate systems, is to accept work as a mode of life; one lives to work, rather than the reverse. The hopes and expectations of these strata are formed in the process of schooling; indeed they have most completely assimilated the ideologies linked to school knowledge and to the credentials conferred by the system. Thus whether professional school people, educational researchers or not, they tend to evaluate people by the criteria to which they, themselves, were subjected. If the child has not fully embraced work as life, he is consigned to the educational netherland. Even the egalitarians (better read populists) accept this regime: their object is to afford those for whom work is a necessary evil into the social world where work is the mission.

Media and Popular Culture

Most educators and critics acknowledge the enormous role of media in contemporary life. The ubiquity and penetration of the visual media such as tv, vcr, dvd, and electronic oral equipment like cd and tape players into the home has called into question the separation of the public and private spheres, and challenged the notion that autonomous private life any longer exists. Which has prompted writers such as Hannah Arendt to insist on the importance of maintaining their separation. (Arendt 1958) When taken together with the advent, in the technical as well as metaphoric sense, of “big brother” where the government now announces openly its intention to subject every telephone and computer to surveillance, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that media are a crucial source of education and may, in comparison to schools, exercise a greater influence on children and youth. Many claim that television for example, is the prime source of political education, certainly the major source of news for perhaps a majority of the population. And there is a growing academic discourse of the importance of popular culture, especially music and film in shaping the values, but more to the point the cultural imaginary of children and adolescents. Many writers have noted the influence of media images on the dream work, on childrens’ aspirations, on their measurement of self-worth, both physically and emotionally. Of course debate rages as to what is learned, for example, the implied frameworks that are masked by the face of objectivity presented by television news, and by fiction which, as everybody knows, is suffused with ethical perspective on everyday relations. (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002 Macdonald 1962, McLuhan 1964)

Nor does every critic accept the conventional wisdom that, in the wake of the dominance of visual media in everyday life, we are, in the phrase of a leading commentator, “amusing ourselves to death”, or that the ideological messages of popular music, sitcoms and other TV fare are simply conformist. (Postman 1986) But it must be admitted that since the 1920 and 1930s when critics argued that the possibility of a radical democracy in which ordinary people participated in the great and small decisions affecting their lives was undermined by the advent of the culture industry, popular culture

has, to a large degree, become a weapon against, as well as for, the people. As a general rule, in periods of upsurge, when social movements succeed in transforming aspects of everyday life as well as the political landscape art, in its “high” as well as popular genres, has expressed popular yearning for a better world. In this vein a vast literature, written largely by participants in the popular culture since the 1960s, rejects the sharp divide between high and low art. While many contemporary cultural critics such as Griel Marcus and Robert Christgau, acknowledge their debt to the work of the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, particularly that of Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno, both by dint of their independent judgement, and the influence of Walter Benjamin—who, despite his elective affinity to critical theory welcomed, with some trepidation, the eclipse of high art-- they find a subversive dimension in rock and roll music. (Marcus 1975; Christgau 2002) It may be that the 1960s phrase, “sex, drugs and rock n’ roll” no longer resonates as a universal sign of rebellion. Yet, when evaluated from the perspective of a society still obsessed with drug use among kids, pre-marital sex and “blames” the music for this non-conformity, the competition between school and popular culture still rages. From anthems of rebellion to musical expressions of youth rejection of conventional sexual and political morality, critics have detected signs of resistance to official mores.

Of course even as punk signalled the conclusion of a sort of “golden age” of rock n’ roll and the succeeding genres—heavy metal, alternative, techno among others-- were confined to market niches, hip-hop took on some of the trapping of a universal oppositional cultural form which, by the 1990s, had captured the imagination of white as well as black kids. Out of the “bonfires” of the Bronx came a new generation of artists whose music and poetry enflamed the embers of discontent. Figures such as Ice Tea, Tupac, Biggie Small and many others articulated the still vibrant rebellion against what George Bernard Shaw had once called “middle class morality”, and the smug, suburban confidence that the cities could be safely consigned to the margins. Like Dylan, some of the hiphop artists were superb poets; Tupac had many imitators and, eventually the genre became fully absorbed by the culture industry, a development which, like the advent of the Velvets, the Who and other avant-garde rock groups of the early 1970s gave rise to an underground. And just as rock n’ roll was accused of leading young people astray into the dungeons of drugs and illicit sex, the proponents of hip hop suffered a similar fate. Some record producers succumbed to demands they censor artistic material, radio stations refused to air some hiphop, and record stores, especially in suburban malls, were advised to restrict sales of certain artists and records.

What white kids learn from successive waves of rock n’ roll and hip hop music is chiefly their right to defy ordinary conventions. After the mid-1950s, the varied genres of rock, rhythm and blues and hip-hop steadily challenged the class, racial and sexual constructs of this ostensibly egalitarian, but puritanical culture. Bored and dissatisfied with middle class morality and its cultural values, teenagers flooded the concerts of rock and hiphop stars, smoked dope and violated the precepts of conventional sexual morality, to the best of their abilities. Many adopt black rhetoric, language and disdain for mainstream values. Of course, middle class kids are obliged to lead a double life: since their preferred artistic and cultural forms are accorded absolutely no recognition in the worlds of legitimate

school knowledge and, for reasons we have already stated, they are in a double bind: Since the 1960s their shared music and the messages of rebellion against a racist, conventional suburban, middle class culture has constituted a quasi-counter community. Yet on penalty of proscription they must absorb school knowledge without, invoking the counter-knowledge of popular culture.

The products of visual culture, particularly film and television, are no less powerful sources of knowledge. Since movies became a leading form of recreation early in the 20th century, critics have distinguished schlock from “films”, produced both by the Hollywood system and by a beleaguered corps of independent film makers. In the 1920s, elaborating the dynamic film technique pioneered by D.W. Griffith the Soviet filmmakers, notably, Sergei Eisenstein and Zhiga Vertov and the great cultural critic, Siegfried Kracauer, fully comprehended the power of visual culture in its ornamental, aesthetic sense, and gave pride of place to film as a source of mass education. Vertov’s *Man With a Movie Camera* and Eisenstein’s *October* were not only great works of art they possessed enormous didactic power. (Kracauer 1995) Vertov evoked the romance of industrial reconstruction in the new Soviet regime and the imperative of popular participation in building a new technologically- directed social reality. And in most of his films Eisenstein was the master of revolutionary memory. The people should not forget the how brutal was the ancient regime and that the future was in their hands and he would produce the images that created a new “memory” even among those who had never experienced the heady days of the revolution. Of course Griffith conveyed a different kind of memory: in his classic *Birth of a Nation* he deconstructed the nobility and romance of the American Civil War and the Reconstruction period by depicting them a corrupt alliance of blacks and northern carpetbaggers, the epithet applied to the staff of the Freemans Bureau and the military which had been dispatched to guarantee the newly won civil rights of millions of African Americans.

In 1950 anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker termed Hollywood “the dream factory”.. While we were entertained by the movies she argued, a whole world of hopes and dreams was being manufactured that had profound effects on our collective unconscious. Rather than coding these experiences as “illusion” she accorded them genuine social influence. With the later writings of Andre Bazin, Francois Truffault, Christian Metz, Stephen Heath, Laura Mulvey and Pauline Kael, movies as an art form, but also a massive influence on what we know and how we learn, came into its own. Film, which was for Critical Theory, just another product of the Culture Industry, is now taken seriously by several generations of critics and enthusiasts as a many-sided cultural force. At the same time film criticism has evolved from reviews in the daily and weekly press and television, whose main function is to advise the public whether to choose a particular film to spend an evening, or to hire a baby-sitter to attend a movie, into a historical and critical discipline worthy of academic departments and programs, and whose practitioners are eligible for academic rank (Powdermaker, 1950; Bazin 1961; Metz 1990 Kael 1994) Despite their ubiquity and vast influence, the kinds of knowledge derived from mass media and popular music remain largely unexamined by the secondary school curriculum. In this respect, public education may be regarded as one of the last bastions of high cultural convention, and of the book. Perhaps more to the point by consistently

refusing to treat popular culture-- television, film, music and video games-- as objects of legitimate intellectual knowledge schools deny the validity of student experiences, even if the objective would be to deconstruct them. Thus, a century after mass-mediated music and visual arts captured our collective imagination, notwithstanding its undeniable commodification, popular culture remains subversive, regardless of its content, because it continues to be outlaw in official precincts. By failing to address this epochal phenomenon, even as its forms are overwhelmingly influential in everyday life, school knowledge loses its capacity to capture the hearts and minds of its main constituents. And if schools cannot enter the students' collective imagination other forms of knowledge are destined fill the vacuum.

Of course the power of television in shaping the political culture is far less well understood. If the overwhelming majority of the population receive their news and viewpoints from television sources then, absent counterweights such as those those that may be provided by social movements, counterhegemonic intellectuals, and independent media, the people are inevitably subjected to the ruling common sense, in which alternatives to the official stories lack legitimacy, even when they are reported in the back pages or by a thirty second spot on the 11O'Clock news. Even journalists have discovered that the integration of the major news organizations with the ruling circles, inhibits their ability to accurately report the news. For example, on October 26,2002 more than 100,000 people descended on Washington, DC to protest the Bush administration's plan to wage war against Iraq. *The New York Times* reporter on the scene estimated the crowd in the "thousands" and stated that the turnout had disappointed organizers who had expected more than 100,000 demonstrators to show up. Since the *Times* functions as a guide to the rest of the American news media, including television and radio news, the coverage of the demonstration throughout the nation was scant, in part because other media relied on the *Times*'s understated numbers. For the majority of Americans, the original report, and its numerous recapitulations, left the impression that the demonstration was a bust. But the *Washington Post*, perhaps the *Times*'s only competitor in daily print journalism, estimated the number of demonstrators more or less accurately, and by the evening of the event a wealth of information and furious condemnation of the *Times*'s biased coverage swarmed over the internet. Days later in an obscure little piece the paper's editors issued a correction without referring the readers to the previous report.

But more importantly the relation of education and class is indicated by the way issues are framed by experts, opinion surveys and the media, which faithfully feature them. That Iraq's president, Saddam Hussein and his government, constitutes an imminent threat to US security-- a judgement that, neither for the media nor for the Bush administration seems to require proof—is the starting point of virtually all of the media's coverage of US foreign policy. On the nightly news, PBS's(The Public Broadcasting System) many programs of talking expert heads, no less that than Sunday morning talk shows on commercial networks where experts mingle with the political directorate to discuss world and national events,the question is almost never posed whether there is warrant for this evaluation, but revolves instead around the issue, not of whether the US should go to war to disarm the regime, but when it inevitably will occur. The taken-for-granted assumption

is that Saddam has viable “weapons of mass destruction” in his possession, whether or not the United Nations inspectors dispatched by the Security Council to investigate this allegation can affirm this US government-manufactured “fact”. Since the Bush administration knows that there nothing as efficient as a war to unify the underlying population behind its policies, and the media is complicit, citizens are deprived of countervailing assessments unless they emanate from within the establishment. And even then, there is only a small chance that these views will play prominently.

Thus when Brent Shocroft, the national security advisor in the first Bush administration, and retiring Republican conservative US Representative Dick Arme expressed reservations about the current administration’s war plans, neither received the notice such an ideological breach might deserve. Only the tiny fraction of the population that reads a handful of liberal newspapers and magazines of opinion were likely to know about their objections. From the perspective of the leading media Americans are in virtual unanimous agreement that we should and will go to war against Iraq. Yet, by the results of some polls, which are poorly reported in most media, we know that support for the war is not only soft, but is qualified; while few are opposed to a war on any terms, many Americans would object to a unilateral attack by US forces. But there are ample indications the administration may proceed *as if* public opinion was unified around its policy. In this mode of governance absent massive protest that may be manifested directly or electorally, silence is tantamount to consent. Without visible dissent, a visibility routinely denied by the media to protestors, the administration interpreted the Republican victory in the 2002 mid-term elections as a retrospective mandate for its war policies.

The pattern of government vetting and censorship of war news was established during World War Two, but the first Bush administration elevated it to an art form. During the 1991 Gulf War the administration took pains to shield reporters from the battlefield and insisted they be quartered in Saudi hotels, miles away from the action. They received all of the war news from government sources, including video footage and photographs shown to them in special briefings. By the contemporary and subsequent testimony of some journalists who had been assigned to cover the events, the Bush administration was intent on not repeating the mistakes of the Vietnam war when the Johnson administration permitted the press full access to American and enemy troops and to the battle scenes. Historians and political observers agree that this policy may have had a major impact on building the anti-war movement, especially the images of body bags being loaded on airplanes and the human gore associated with any close combat, supplied by staff photographers. Americans never got the chance to view the physical and human destruction visited by US bombs and missiles on Baghdad or the extent of US casualties. The war was short-lived so the political damage at home was relatively light. Needless to say, that of the 700,000 troops who entered the combat area some 150,000 have since reported psychological or physical injuries, barely makes it to the back pages of most newspapers, let alone the visual media..

Note well, at its inception, some educators and producers touted the educational value of television. Indeed perhaps the major impact of the dominance of visual culture on our

everyday knowledge is that to be, is to be seen. Celebrity is a word that is reserved for people whose names become “household” words. Celebrity is produced by the repetition of appearances of an individual on the multitude of television talk shows —Oprah, Today, Leno, Lederman, and others—in which personalities constitute the substance of the event. The point of the typical interview between the anchor and her or his subject is not what is said, or even that the guest is currently appearing in a film or television show, the ostensible purpose of the segment. The interview is a statement of who exists, and by implication, who doesn’t. The event has little to do with economic or high-level political power, for these people are largely invisible, or on occasion may appear on the *Charlie Rose* show on PBS or, formerly, on ABC’s *Nightline*. The making of sports, entertainment, political or literary celebrities defines the boundary of popular hope or aspiration. The leading television celebrity talk shows are instances of the American credo that, however high the barrier, anyone can become a star. For this is not an instance of having charisma or exuding aura: the celebs are not larger than life, but are shown to be ordinary in an almost banal sense. Fix your nose, cap your teeth, lose weight, take acting lessons and, with a little luck, the person on the screen could be me.

The Labor and Radical Movements as Educational Sites

The working class intellectual as a social type precedes and parallels the emergence of universal public education. At the dawn of the public school movement in the 1830s, the ante bellum labor movement, that consisted largely of literate skilled workers, favored six years of schooling in order to transmit to their children the basics of reading and writing, but opposed compulsory attendance in secondary schools. The reasons were bound up with their congenital suspicion of the state which they believed never exhibited sympathy for the workers’ cause. Although opposed to child labor, the early workers’ movements were convinced that the substance of education—literature, history, philosophy—should be supplied by the movement itself. Consequently in both the oral and the written tradition workers organizations often constituted an alternate university to that of public schools. The active program of many workers and radical movements until world war two consisted largely in education through newspapers, literacy classes for immigrants where the reading materials were drawn from labor and socialist classics, and world literature. These were supplemented by lectures offered by independent scholars who toured the country in the employ of lecture organizations commissioned by the unions and radical organizations (Tannenbaum 1995)

But the shop floor was also a site of education. Skilled workers were usually literate in their own language and in English, and many were voracious readers and writers. Union and radical newspapers often ran poetry and stories written by workers. Socialist-led unions such as those in the needle trades, machinists, breweries, and bakeries sponsored educational programs; in the era when the union contract was still a rarity, the union was not so much an agency of contract negotiation and enforcement as an educational, political and social association. In his autobiography Samuel Gompers, the founding AFL president, remembers his fellow cigar makers hiring a “reader” in the 1870s, who sat at the center of the work-floor and read from literary and historical classics as well as more contemporary works of political and economic analysis such as the writings of

Marx and Engels. Reading groups met in the back of a bar, in the union hall, or in the local affiliate of the socialist wing of the nationality federations. Often these groups were ostensibly devoted to preparing immigrants to pass the obligatory language test for citizenship status. But the content of the reading was, in addition to labor and socialist newspapers and magazines, often supplemented by works of fiction by Shakespeare, the great 19th century novelists and poets, and of Marx and Karl Kautsky. In its anarchist inflection, Kropotkin, Moses Hess and Bakunin were the required texts.(Gompers 1924)

In New York, Chicago, San Francisco and other large cities where the Socialist and Communist movements had considerable membership and a fairly substantial periphery of sympathizers, the parties established adult schools that not only offered courses pertaining to political and ideological knowledge, but were vehicles for many working and middle class students to gain a general education. Among them, in New York, the socialist-oriented Rand School and the Communist sponsored Jefferson School(formerly the Workers' School) lasted until the early 1950s when, due to the decline of a left intellectual culture among workers as much the contemporary repressive political environment, they closed. But in their respective heydays, from the 1920s to the late 1940s, for tens of thousands of working class people-- , many of them high school students and industrial workers-- , these schools were alternate universities;they not only offered courses that promoted the party's ideology an program. Many courses concerned history, literature and philosophy and, at least at the Jefferson school the student could study art, drama and music, and could their children. The tradition was revived, briefly, by the 1960s New Left which, in similar sites, sponsored free universities where the term "free" designated not an absence of tuition fees but signaled they were ideologically and intellectually unbound to either the traditional left parties or to the conventional school system. I participated in organizing New York's Free University and two of its successors While not affiliated to the labor movement or socialist parties, it succeeded in attracting more than a thousand students in each of its semesters—mostly young-- and offered a broad range of courses which were taught by people of divergent intellectual and political orientations, including some free market libertarians who were attracted to the school's non-sectarianism..

When I worked in a steel mill in the late 1950s some of us formed a group that read current literature, labor history and economics. I discussed books and magazine articles with some of my fellow workers in bars as well as on breaks. Tony Mazzocchi, who was at the same time a worker and union officer of a Long Island local of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, organized a similar group and I knew of several other cases where young workers did the same. Some of these groups evolved into rank and file caucuses that eventually contested the leadership of their local unions; others were mainly for the self-edification of the participants and had no particular political goals.

But beyond formal programs since industrializing era the working class intellectual, although by no means visible in the United States, has been part of shop-floor culture. In almost every workplace there is a person or persons to whom other workers turn for information about the law, the union contract, contemporary politics or, equally important, as a source of general education. This individual(s) may or may not be

schooled but, until the late 1950s, had rarely any college. For schools were not the primary source of their knowledge. They were, and are, largely self-educated. In my own case, having left Brooklyn College after less than a year, I worked in a variety of industrial production jobs. When I worked the midnight shift, I got off at 8:00 in the morning, ate breakfast, and spent four hours in the library before going home. Mostly I read American and European history and political economy, particularly the physiocrats, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Maynard Keynes and Joseph Schumpeter. Marx's Capital I read in high school and owned the three volumes.

My friend Russell Rommele, who worked in a nearby mill, was also an autodidact. His father was a first generation German-American brewery worker, with no particular literary interests. But Russell had been exposed to reading a wide range of historical and philosophical works as a high school student at Saint Benedict's Prep, a Jesuit institution. The priests singled out Russell for the priesthood and mentored him in theology and social theory. The experience radicalized him and he decided not to answer the call but to enter the industrial working class instead. Like me he was active in the union and Newark Democratic party politics. Working as an educator with a local union in the auto industry recently, I have met several active unionists who are intellectuals. The major difference between them and those of my generation is that they are college graduates, although none claims to have acquired their love of learning or their analytic perspective from schools. One is a former member of a radical organization and another learned his politics from participation in a shop-based study group/union caucus organized by a member of a socialist grouplet which dissolved in the mid-1990s when the group lost a crucial union election. In both instances, with the demise of their organizational affiliations, they remain habituated to reading, writing and union activity

Parents, Neighborhood, Class culture

John Locke observes that, consistent with his rejection of innate ideas, even if conceptions of good and evil are present in divine or civil law, morality is constituted by reference to our parents, relatives and especially the "club" of peers to which we belong:

"he who imagines commendation and disgrace not to be strong motives to men to accommodate themselves to the opinions and rules of those with whom they converse seems little skilled in the nature or the history of mankind: the greatest part whereof we shall find govern themselves, chiefly, if not solely by this law of *fashion* (emphasis in the original); and so they do what keeps them in reputation with their company, little regard for the laws of God or the magistrate." (Locke 1959 book one chapter 28, #12, p.478)

William James put the matter equally succinctly:

"A man's social self is the recognition which he gets from his mates. We are not only gregarious animals, liking to be in the sight of our fellows, but we have an innate propensity to get ourselves noticed, and noticed favorably, by our kind. No more fiendish

punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, that that should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof.” (James 1890,351)

That the social worlds of peers and family are the chief referents for the formation of the social self, neither philosopher had a doubt. Each in his own fashion situates the individual in social context, which provides a “common measure of virtue and vice”(Locke 1959) even as they acknowledge the ultimate choice resides with the individual self. These, and not the institutions, even those that have the force of law, are the primary sources of authority.

Hannah Arendt argues that education “by its very nature cannot forego either authority or tradition”. Nor can it base itself on the presumption that children share an autonomous existence from adults.(Arendt 1961,180-81) Yet schooling ignores the reality of the society of kids at the cost of undermining its own authority. The society of kids is in virtually all classes an alternative and opposition site of knowledge and of moral valuation. We have already seen how working class kids get working class jobs by means of their rebellion against school authority. Since refusal and resistance is a hallmark of the moral order, the few who will not obey the invocation to fail or to perform indifferently in school often find themselves marginalized or expelled from the community of kids While they adopt a rationality that can be justified on eminently practical grounds the long tradition of rejection of academic culture has proven hard to break, even in the wake of evidence that those working class jobs to which they were oriented no longer exist. For what is at stake in adolescent resistance is their perception that the blandishments of the adult world are vastly inferior the pleasures of their own. In the first place the new service economy offers few inducements: wages are low, the job is boring and the future bleak. And since the schools now openly present themselves as a link in the general system of control it may appear some some students that cooperation is a form of self-deception.

If not invariably, then in many households parents provide to the young a wealth of knowledge: the family mythologies which feature an uncle or aunt, a grandparent or an absent parent. These are the stories, loosely based on some actual event(s) in which the family member has distinguished her or himself in various ways that(usually)illustrate a moral virtue or defect the telling of which constitutes a kind of didactic message. Even when not attached to an overt narrative, parable, or myth we learn from our parents by their actions in relation to us and others:how do they deal with adversity? how do they address ordinary, everyday problems? What do they learn from their own trials and tribulations and what do they say to us? What are our parents attitudes towards money, joblessness, everyday life disruptions such as sudden, acute illness or accidents? What do they learn from the endless conflicts with their parent(s) over issues of sex, money and household responsibilities?

The relative weight of parental to peer authority is an empirical question that cannot be decided in advance; what both have in common is their location within everyday life. The parents are likely to be more suseptible to the authority of law and of its magistrates and,

in a world of increasing uncertainty, will worry that if their children choose badly they may be left behind. But the associations with our peers we make in everyday life provide the recognition that we crave, define what is worthy of praise or blame, and confer approbation or disapproval on our decisions. But having made a choice that runs counter to that of “their company” or club the individual must form, or join, a new “company” to confer the judgement of virtue on her or his action. This company must, of necessity, consist of “peers”, the definition of which has proven fungible.

Religion, the law and, among kids, school authorities face the obstacles erected by the powerful rewards and punishments meted out by the “clubs” to which people are affiliated. At a historical conjunction when, beneath the relentless pressure imposed by capital to transform all labor into wage labor, thereby forcing every adult into the paid labor force, the society of kids increasing occupies the space of civil society. The neighborhood, once dominated by women and small shopkeepers, has all but disappeared save for the presence of children and youth. As parents toil for endless hours to pay the ever mounting debts incurred by home ownership, perpetual car and appliance payments, and the costs of health care, kids are increasingly on their own and these relationships have consequences for their conceptions of education and life.

Some recent studies and teacher observations have discovered a not inconsiderable reluctance among black students in elite universities to perform well in school, even those of professional/managerial family backgrounds. Many seem indifferent to arguments that show that school performance is a central prerequisite to better jobs and higher status in the larger workworld. Among the more acute speculations is the conclusion that black students resistance reflects an anti-intellectual bias, and a hesitation, if not refusal, to enter the mainstream corporate world. Perhaps the charge of anti-intellectualism is better understood as healthy skepticism about the chance that a corporate career will provide the well-publicized satisfactions. There are similar indications among some relatively affluent white students as well. Although by no means a majority some students are less enamored by the workworld to which they, presumably, have been habituated by school, especially by the prospect of perpetual work. In the third tier universities, state and private alike, apparently forced by their parents to enroll, many students wonder out loud why they are there. Scepticism about schooling still abounds even as they graduate high school and enroll in post-secondary schools in record numbers. According to one colleague of mine who teaches in a third tier private university in the New York Metropolitan area, many of these mostly suburban students “sleepwalk” through their classes, do not participate in class discussions and are lucky to get a “C” grade.

In the working class neighborhoods—white, black and Latino—the word is out: given the absence of viable alternatives, you must try to obtain that degree, but this defines the limit of loyalty to the enterprise. Based on testimonies of high school and community college teachers for every student who takes school knowledge seriously there are twenty or more who are time-servers. Most are ill-prepared to perform academic work and, since the community colleges and state four year colleges and “teaching” universities simply lack the resources to provide the means by which their school performance can improve, beyond the credential there is little motivation among students to try to get an education.

In some instances those who break from their club and enter the regime of school knowledge is a decision that risks being drummed out of a lifetime of relationships with their peers. What has euphemistically been described as “peer pressure” bears, among other moral structures, on the degree to which kids are permitted to cross over the line into the precincts of adult authority. While being a success in school is not equivalent to squealing on a friend or to the cops, or transgressing some sacred moral code of the society of kids, it comes close to committing an act of betrayal. This is comprehensible only if the reader is willing to suspend prejudice that schooling is tantamount to education and is an unqualified “good” as compared to the presumed evil of school failure, or the decision of the slacker to rebel by refusing to succeed.

To invoke the concept of “class” in either educational debates or any other politically charged discourse generally refers to the white working class. Educational theory and practice treats Blacks and Latinos, regardless of their economic positions, as unified, bio-identities. That blacks kids from professional, managerial and business backgrounds share more with their white counterparts than with working class blacks is generally ignored by most educational writers. Just as, in race discourse “whites” are undifferentiated, since the war “race”—which refers in slightly different registers to people of African origin and those who migrated from Latin countries of South America and the Carribean--, are treated as a unified category. The narrowing of the concept limits our ability to discern class at all. I want to suggest that, although we must stipulate ethnic, gender, race and occupational distinction among differentiated strata of wage labor, with the exception of children of salaried professional and technical groups, where the culture of schooling plays a decisive role, class education transcends these distinctions. No doubt there are gradations among the strata that comprise this social formation, But the most privileged professional strata (physicians, attorneys, scientists, professors), and the high-level managers are self-reproducing, not principally through schooling but through social networks. These include: private schools, some of which are residential; clubs and associations; and, in suburban public schools the self-selection of students on the basis of distinctions. Show me a school friendship between the son or daughter of a corporate manager and the child of a janitor or factory worker and I will show you a community service project to get into one of the “select” colleges or universities such as Brown, Oberlin and Wesleyan.

Schooling selects a fairly small number of children of the class of wage labor for genuine class mobility. In the first half of the 20th century, having lost its appeal among middle class youth, the Catholic Church turned to working class students as a source of cadre recruitment. In my neighborhood of the East Bronx two close childhood friends, both of Italian background, entered the priesthood. As sons of construction workers the Church provided their best chance to escape the hardships and economic uncertainties of manual labor. Another kid became a pharamacist because the local Catholic college, Fordham University, offered scholarships. A fourth was among the tiny coterie of students who passed the test for one of the city’s special schools, Bronx Science, and became a science teacher. Otherwise almost everybody else remained a worker or, like my best friend, Kenny, went to prison.

Despite the well publicized claim that anyone can escape their condition of social and economic birth—a claim reproduced by schools and by the media with numbing regularity—most working class students, many of whom have some college credits, but often do not graduate—end up in low and middle-level service jobs that do not pay a decent working class wage. Owing to the steep decline of unionized industrial production jobs those who enter factories increasingly draw wages that are substantially below union standards. Those who do graduate find work in computers, although rarely at the professional levels. The relatively low paid become k-12 teachers and health care professionals, mostly nurses and technicians, or enter the social service field as case workers, medical social workers or line social welfare workers. The question I want to pose is whether these “professional” occupations represent genuine mobility.

During the post-war economic boom which made possible a significant expansion of spending for schools, the social services, and administration of public goods, the public sector workplace became a favored site of black and Latino recruitment, mainly for clerical, maintenance and entry-level patient care jobs in hospitals and other health care facilities. Within several decades a good number advanced to middle and registered nursing, but not in all sections of the country. As unionization spread to the non-profit private sector as well as public employment in the 1960s and 1970s, these jobs paid enough to enable many enjoy became known as a “middle class” living standard but also a measure of job security offered by union security and civil service status. While it is true that “job security” has often been observed in its breach the traditional deal made by teachers, nurses and social workers was that they traded higher incomes for job security. But after about 1960 spurred by the resurgent civil rights movement, these “second-level” professionals—white and black-- began to see themselves as workers more than professionals: they formed unions, struck for higher pay and shorter hours, and assumed a very unprofessional adversarial stance towards institutional authority. Contracts stipulated higher salaries, definite hours-- a sharp departure from professional ideology-- on seniority as a basis for layoffs, just like any industrial contract, and demand substantial vacation and sick leave.

Their assertion of working-class values and social position may have been strategic, indeed it inspired the largest wave of union organizing since the 1930s. But, together with the entrance of huge numbers of women and blacks into the public and quasi-public sector workforces it was as well a symptom of the proletarianization of the second-tier professions. Several decades later salaried physicians made a similar discovery; they formed unions and struck against high malpractice insurance costs as much as the onerous conditions imposed on their autonomy by Health Maintenance Organizations and government authorities bent on cost containment, often at their expense. More to the point, the steep rise of public employees’ salaries and benefits posed the question of how to maintain services in times of fiscal austerity which might be due to economic downturn or to pro-business tax policies. The answer has been that the political and public officials told employees that the temporary respite from the classical trade union trade-off was over. All public employees have suffered relative deterioration in their salaries and benefits. Since the mid-1970s fiscal crises, begun in New York City,

they have experienced layoffs for the first time since the depression. And their unions have been on a continuous concessionary bargaining mode for decades. In the politically and ideologically repressive environment of the last twenty five years the class divide has sharpened. Ironically, in the wake of the attacks by legislatures and business against their hard-won gains in the early 1980s the teachers unions abandoned their militant, class posture and reverted to professionalism and to a center-right political strategy.

In truth schools are learning sites, even if only for a handful, of intellectual knowledge. In the main they transmit the instrumental logic of credentialism, together with their transformation from institutions of discipline to those of control, especially in working-class districts. Even talented, dedicated teachers have more difficulty reaching kids and convincing them that the life of the mind may hold unexpected rewards, even if the career implications of critical thought are not apparent. The breakdown of the mission of public schools has produced varied forms of disaffection; if school violence has abated in some places, it does not signify the decline of gangs and other “clubs” that signify the autonomous world of youth. The society of kids is more autonomous because, in contrast to 1960s, official authorities no longer offer hope; instead, in concert with the doctrine of control they threaten punishment which includes, but is not necessarily associated with, incarceration. Although I note that the large number of drug busts of young black and Latino men should not be minimized. With over a million blacks, more than 3% of the African American population—most of them young-- within the purview of the criminal justice system, the law may be viewed as a more or less concerted effort to counter by force of the power of peers. This may be regarded in the context of the failure schools. Of course, more than three hundred years ago John Locke knew the limits of the magistrates indeed, of any adult authority to overcome the power of the society of kids.(Giroux)

Conclusion

What are the requisite changes that would transform schools from credentials mills and institutions of control to a site of education that prepares young people to see themselves as active participants in the world?. As my analysis implies the fundamental condition is to abolish high stakes standardized tests that dominate the curriculum and subordinate teachers to the role of drill masters and subject students to stringent controls. By this proposal I do not mean to eliminate the need for evaluative tools. The essay is a fine measure of both writing ability and of the student’s grasp of literature, social science and history. While it must be admitted that math and science as much as language proficiency require considerable rote learning, the current curriculum and pedagogy in these fields includes neither a historical account of the changes in scientific and mathematical theory, nor a metaconceptual explanation of what the disciplines are about. Nor are courses in language at the secondary level ever concerned with etymological issues, comparative cultural study of semantic differences, and other topics that might relieve the boredom of rote learning by providing depth of understanding. The broader understanding of science in the modern world—its relation to technology, war and medicine, for example-- should surely be integrated into the curriculum; some of these issues appear in the textbooks, but teachers rarely discuss them because they are busy preparing students for the high stakes

tests in which knowledge of the social contexts for science, language and math are not included.

I agree with Arendt that education “cannot forgo either authority or tradition”. But authority must be earned rather than assumed and the transmission of tradition needs to be critical rather than worshipful. If teachers were allowed to acknowledge student scepticism, incorporated kids’ knowledge into the curriculum by making what they know the object of rigorous study, especially popular music and television, they might be treated with greater respect. But there is no point denying the canon; one of the more egregious conditions of subordination is the failure of schools to expose students to its best exemplars, for people who have no cultural capital are thereby condemned to social and political marginality, let alone deprived of some of the pleasures to be derived from encounters with genuine works of art. When the New York City Board of Education (now the department of education) mandates that during every semester high school English classes read a Shakespeare play and one or two works of 19th century English literature, but afford little or no access to the best Russian novels of the 19th century, no opportunities to examine some of the most influential works of western philosophy, beginning with the Milesians through Plato, Aristotle and the major figures of “modern philosophy”, and provide no social and historical context for what is learned, tradition is observed in the breach more than in its practice. And when, under budgetary pressures elementary and secondary schools cut music and art from the curriculum, they deprive students of the best sources for cultivating the creative imagination. Schools fulfill their responsibility to students and to the communities in which they live when, at every level, they offer a program of systematic, critical learning which, simultaneously, provides students with “access” to the rich traditions of so-called Western thought, history, the arts, including its literature, and opens parallel vistas of Africa, Asia and Latin America.. (Aronowitz 2000, chapter 7)

Finally, the schools should relieve themselves of their ties to corporate interests and reconstruct the curriculum along the line of genuine intellectual endeavor. Nor should the schools be seen as career conduits, although this function will be difficult to displace, for among other reasons, that in an era of high economic anxiety many kids and their parents worry about the future and seek some practical purchase on it. It will take some convincing that their best leg up is to be educated. It is unlikely in the present environment, but possible in some places.

One could elaborate these options; this is only an outline.. In order to come close to their fulfillment at least three things are needed. First we require a conversation concerning the nature and scope of education and the limits of schooling as an educational site. Along with this theorists and researchers need to link their knowledge of popular culture, and culture in the anthropological sense, that is, everyday life, with the politics of education. Specifically, we need to examine why in late capitalist societies, the public sphere withers, while the corporatization process penetrates every sphere of life. We need teachers who, by their own education, are intellectuals who respect and want to help children obtain a genuine education, regardless of their social class. For this we need a new regime of teacher education that is founded on the idea that the educator must be

educated well. It would surely entail abolishing the current curricula of most education schools, if not the schools themselves. The endless courses on “teaching methods” would be replaced with courses in the natural and social sciences, mathematics, philosophy, history and literature. Some of these would address the relation of education, in all of its forms, to their social and historical context. In effect, the teacher becomes an intellectual, capable of the critical appropriation of world histories and cultures. And we need a movement of parents, students, teachers and the labor movement armed with a political program directed to forcing legislatures to adequately fund schooling at the federal, state and local levels and boards of education to deauthorize high stakes standardized tests that currently drive the curriculum and pedagogy. (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985) [note: please add to the bibliography Aronowitz and Giroux Education Under Siege South Hadley MA: Bergin and Garvey 1985]

Having proposed these changes, we need to remain mindful of the limitations of schooling and the likelihood that youth will acquire knowledge that prepares them for life, like sex, the arts, where to find jobs, how to bind with other people, how to fight, how to love and hate, outside of schools. The deinstitutionalization of education does not require abandoning schools. But they should be rendered benign, removed, as much as possible from the tightening grip of the corporate, warfare state. In turn teachers must resist becoming agents of the prison system, of the drug companies, of corporate capital. In the last instance, the best chance for education resides in the communities, in social movements and in the kids themselves.