

## READING COURSES FOR TEACHERS IN THE DISCIPLINES: ON THE INCORPORATION OF ISSUES FROM CRITICAL CURRICULUM THEORY

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"The tendency of educational development to proceed by reaction from one thing to another, to adopt for one year, or for a term of seven years, this or that new study or method of teaching, and then as abruptly to swing over to some new educational gospel; is a result which would be impossible if teachers were adequately moved by their own independent intelligence. The willingness of teachers, especially of those occupying administrative positions, to become submerged in the routine detail of their callings, to expend the bulk of their energy upon forms and rules and regulations, and reports and percentages, is another evidence of the absence of intellectual vitality. If teachers were possessed by the spirit of an abiding student of education this spirit would find some way of breaking through the mesh and coil of circumstance and would find expression for itself" (Dewey 1904, p. 321).

Dewey sets forth a tremendous challenge which is just as important today as it was eighty years ago. In effect, he argues that although educators are necessarily immersed in the detailed operations of their educational roles, they should maintain a foundationally questioning posture and see beyond immediate necessity as "students of education" in a larger sense. The purpose of this paper is to present one method which has been successful in helping education students enrolled in "Reading in the Content Areas" to develop a broader sense of "students of education"; and, at the same time, facilitate the processing of specific information about the incorporation of reading strategies into the teaching of various disciplines. First, the difficulties involved in maintaining this larger perspective will be discussed; second, the issues and materials used to foster a broader perspective will be detailed; and third, positive aspects of the implementation procedures will be reported.

### Difficulties in Developing Overall Perspectives

How can education students in content reading courses be encouraged to grow as true "students of education"? A central problem involved in answering this question revolves around the concept of paradigm as developed by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. A paradigm, in Kuhn's terms is more than a similarity in methodological procedure. Rather, it is a natural convergence of individuals with similar fundamental ideologies. He states that although there are "seminole" thinkers who actually create fundamentally new perspectives, generally, individual researchers and scientists accept as given a particular perspective and proceed with what he labels "normal" science. In "normal" science the focus is on clarification and refinement of previously accepted perspectives.

The basic idea behind Kuhn's conception of paradigm is applicable to education in general, the area of reading, and specifically reading in the disciplines. As Dewey states, educators do tend to "proceed by reaction from one thing to another" in groups. This sense of group identity not only exists but is also transmitted to pre-service and in-service teachers by teacher educators through course work such as "Reading in the Content Areas", and, in turn our students transmit this propensity for the acceptance of givens to their students in elementary schools and high schools. Greene states that because teachers are "often submerged in the bureaucracies for which they work, they simply accede to what is taken for granted. Identifying themselves as spokespersons for—or representatives of—the system is its local manifestation, they avoid interrogation and critique. They transmit, often tacitly, benign or neutral versions of the social reality. They may, deliberately or not, adapt these

to accommodate to what they perceive to be the class origins or the capacities of their students, but, whether they are moving those young people towards assembly lines or administrative offices, they are likely to present the world around as given, probably unchangeable and predefined" (p. 56).

The "givens" Greene refers to here are those which define the limits of particular paradigms, Popkewitz (1980) describes the existence of three fundamentally different paradigms in education: empirical/analytical, symbolic and critical. Briefly, the empirical/analytical paradigm is modeled after physical science. There is a reliance on the replicable measure of observable data, objectivity and the use of "scientific method". The "symbolic" paradigm utilizes a view borrowed from psychology, sociology, and anthropology. From this perspective, case studies and in-depth ethnographic procedures are used to uncover the meanings of language usage, societal roles and individual or group interrelationships. In the critical paradigm, analysis of the political and ideological underpinnings of education are examined in an effort to expose the latent function of schooling as situated within the nexus of a modern technological society. Particular attention is given to the unequal distribution of power and wealth in society and the role of schools in maintaining the existing hierarchical framework.

An examination of popular contemporary reading periodicals, such as *The Reading Research Quarterly*, *The Journal of Reading*, *The Reading Teacher*, *The Journal of Reading Behavior*, would clearly indicate the empirical/analytical paradigm is the predominate reading research paradigm. In an examination of contemporary reading texts, Beyer and Rouse (1981) found a similar reliance on empirical/analytical perspective as the foundation and support for reading methods texts.

This similarity in foundational perspective throughout a field such as "reading" is, at least in part, responsible for the ease with which educators, in Dewey's words, "swing over to some new educational gospel." The result can be teachers who are tailored as dispensers of pre-packaged educational doctrine rather than "students of education" who are capable of bringing their own intellect to bear on education as a means of emancipation.

Given the need for a broad perspective and Dewey's differentiation between teacher training versus teacher education, the value of presenting diverse alternatives to popular procedures becomes clear.

### Issues And Materials For An Alternative Perspective

In a field such as reading which focuses in part on various teaching styles, techniques, and strategies, there is a natural inclination to conceive of teaching as a technical, quantifiable, and ameliorative activity. Given the continual demands placed upon classroom teachers to respond to and interact with students and curricula on a variety of levels, this emphasis on amelioration and technique is understandable. In the area of reading instruction, the task of the reading teacher is often thought to consist of applying the proper series of "treatments" or "interventions" to enable the student to improve his or her reading performance, as measured through observable behaviors. This orientation has the effect of regarding reading as primarily an apolitical enterprise to be taught by specialists who have mastered the requisite skills, techniques and materials.

Within the last decade or two there have been developments in curriculum theory which directly challenge this apolitical orientation. Rather than treating schools as neutral institutions, to be understood via the application of specific input and output measures, a large body of recent scholarship in curriculum inquiry has sought to explicate the social, political, and ideological role schools serve in contemporary society. In this area, answers are sought to questions such as: whose knowledge gets taught in schools; what are the hidden and overt meanings which become attached to school practice; how are these related to the continued dominance of certain social classes at the expense

of other, less powerful groups; and so on. Questions like these have spawned an interest in the ways in which schools serve as agents of economic and cultural reproduction.

For example, Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that the hidden curriculum of schools corresponds to the dispositional and psychological needs of a capitalist labor market. Young (1971) urges us to consider how forms of knowledge and their dissemination may be related to the unequal distribution of goods and power in society. In rejecting correspondence theories of ideological domination, Apple (1976) argues that the hegemonic control of cultural practices and institutions requires a less mechanistic, more mediated analysis. These and other writers in education have greatly extended our understanding of the ideological and political purposes of educational institutions.

In an effort to convey this critical view of existing practice, three articles have been particularly helpful in getting students enrolled in "Reading in the Content Areas" to see beyond the mastery of specific techniques to the positioning of these ideas within a larger ideological and political perspective. First, Maxine Green's "The Matter of Mystification: Teacher Education in Unquiet Times" from her book *Landscapes of Learning* (Teachers College Press, 1978) articulates the pressing need for educators at all levels to challenge the apparent "givens" within which they work and to move toward more "authentic" ways of relating within the educational context. She presents a very strong argument for the fact that many of our world conceptions are formed in a state of mystification. As a result, a large part of our energies as educators are focused on "surface" realities." In the process, attention is distracted from the real purposes and implications underlying our activities.

An example from contemporary practices in high schools may help to clarify the concept of mystification and its relationship to reading. Some high school teachers have responded to a decline in the reading ability of their students by decreasing the amount and difficulty of reading assignments, and by replacing reading as the major learning medium, with lecture and audio visual methods.

On the surface, this change may have helped some students master specific aspects of isolated content. In the process, however, the larger issue of teaching students "how to learn" and tapping the vast horizons of incidental learning through individual wide reading has lost ground. In effect, the focus on mastering specific content material in isolation has, in some ways, masked a deeper problem of general access to information and literature. On another level, teachers who accept the limited reading performance of their students and resort to coping strategies as in this example, actually help perpetuate societal inequalities by limiting general social mobility. (For a detailed analysis of this concept, see Apple, 1979.)

Second, two chapters from Michael Apples' *Ideology and Curriculum* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) are particularly useful in helping students see the political origins and power structure underlying the development of schools and the ideological impact of the activities in which they are involved. In "Curricular History and Social Control" (p. 61-81) Apple examines the influence of powerful groups in society on the formation and direction of public education. In his chapter titled "Commonsense Categories and the Politics of Labeling" (p. 123-153), Apple lays out some of the adverse consequences in the over use of labeling and categorization procedures. Beyond its value in opening student minds to an alternative perspective, this chapter is of special relevance to the area of reading with its use of standardized measures of performance, ability grouping and special programs for "disabled readers."

A third article which is especially helpful is John Bartholomew's "Schooling Teachers: The Myth of the Liberal College" (p.

114-123) from *Explorations in the Politics of School Knowledge*, (Nafferton, 1976). Bartholomew argues that although college and university educators teach liberal ideas, they do so utilizing a conservative framework in the process. The result is a situation in which students are forced to separate their mental activity from the actual practices in which they are involved. Just as Dewey distinguished "internal" and "external" attention for elementary students, Bartholomew argues that education students are required to separate theory (that which is talked about in education classes) from practice (those things that professors actually do). The knowledge of this separation for students can mean an increased awareness of the limitation of their educational preparation and the propensity they are likely to have for practicing, as teachers, not what they have talked about theoretically but the conservatism which they have practiced all along.

### Implementation

The perspectives referred to above can be incorporated into courses for teachers of reading in the disciplines by simply using these articles as examples of "content" in giving demonstrations of content reading techniques. When this is done, not only are alternative perspectives presented but there are the additional pedagogical benefits of increasing teacher empathy for future students, providing concrete examples for the demonstration of important reading skills, and helping students understand the utility of specific reading techniques.

A big problem for pre-service teachers is understanding the relevance of abstract educational content. In short, because they have no "teaching" experience, it is often difficult for them to understand the complexities of teaching students with backgrounds which are diverse from their own. In-service teachers also can lose sight of the difficulty of the material they work with because of their continual contact with it. In both cases, some teachers have little empathy for students who are having a difficult time with their content material. Because the above mentioned articles are written for curriculum theorists, they are written with a heavy semantic load and address issues with terminology which is generally unfamiliar to individuals without a background in curriculum theory. The result is that for a majority of students, these articles are written close to their frustration levels and in reading them, they experience feelings which are similar to those many of their own students will face.

Pedagogically, there is little question about the importance of concrete examples. And, the above mentioned articles have proven very useful in demonstrating and giving students practice in content related reading topics such as the use of readability formulas, SW3R, differences between expository and narrative text, etc.

A particularly useful aspect of using these articles is in helping teachers see the utility of important reading techniques. By using these articles not only do students get contact with diverse issues, a sense of empathy for future students and concrete experience, but furthermore, they can experience the benefits of specific reading techniques themselves. For example, in teaching the importance of previewing important vocabulary in a directed reading activity, half of the class might read a section of Maxine Green's, "The Matter of Mystification: Teacher Education in Unquiet Times" without discussing the definitions of key terms. In a post-reading comparison of the understanding of key concept, students who had the advantage of an introduction to important vocabulary have invariably demonstrated a deeper understanding of what they read. It seems likely that individuals who experience the positive effect of techniques such as these as learners will be

influenced to use them when helping their own students.

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