THE POLITICS OF THE TEXTBOOK

EDITED BY
Michael W. Apple
AND
Linda K.
Christian-Smith

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Whose Knowledge Is of Most Worth?

Reality doesn't stalk around with a label. What something is, what it does, one's evaluation of it, all this is not naturally preordained. It is socially constructed. This is the case even when we talk about the institutions that organize a good deal of our lives. Take schools, for example. For some groups of people, schooling is seen as a vast engine of democracy—opening horizons, ensuring mobility, and so on. For others, the reality of schooling is strikingly different. It is seen as a form of social control or, perhaps, as the embodiment of cultural dangers, institutions whose curricula and teaching practices threaten the moral universe of the students who attend them.

While not all of us may agree with this diagnosis of what schools do, this latter position contains a very important insight. It recognizes that behind Spencer's famous question about "What knowledge is of most worth?" there lies another even more contentious question, "*Whose* knowledge is of most worth?"

During the past two decades, a good deal of progress has been made on answering the question of whose knowledge becomes socially legitimate in schools.[1] While much still remains to be understood, we are now much closer to having an adequate understanding of the relationship between school knowledge and the larger society than before. Yet little attention has actually been paid to that one artifact that plays such a major role in defining whose culture is taught—*the textbook*. Of course, there have been literally thousands of studies of textbooks over the years.[2] But until relatively recently, by and large, most of these remained unconcerned with the politics of culture. All too many researchers could still be characterized by the phrase coined years ago by C. Wright Mills, "abstract empiricists." These "hunters and gatherers of social numbers" remain unconnected to the relations of inequality that surround them.[3]

This is a distinct problem since texts are not simply "delivery systems" of "facts." They are at once the results of political, economic, and cultural

activities, battles, and compromises. They are conceived, designed, and authored by real people with real interests. They are published within the political and economic constraints of markets, resources, and power.[4] And what texts mean and how they are used are fought over by communities with distinctly different commitments and by teachers and students as well.

As one of us has argued in a series of volumes, it is naive to think of the school curriculum as neutral knowledge.[5] Rather, what counts as legitimate knowledge is the result of complex power relations and struggles among identifiable class, race, gender/sex, and religious groups. Thus, education and power are terms of an indissoluble couplet. It is at times of social upheaval that this relationship between education and power becomes most visible. Such a relationship was and continues to be made manifest in the struggles by women, people of color, and others to have their history and knowledge included in the curriculum. Driven by an economic crisis and a crisis in ideology and authority relations, it has become even more visible in the past decade or so in the resurgent conservative attacks on schooling. "Authoritarian populism" is in the air, and the New Right has been more than a little successful in bringing its own power to bear on the goals, content, and process of schooling.[6]

The movement to the right has not stopped outside the schoolroom door. Current plans for the centralization of authority over teaching and curriculum, often cleverly disguised as "democratic" reforms, are hardly off the drawing board before new management proposals or privatization initiatives are introduced. In the United States, evidence for such offensives abounds with the introduction of mandatory competency testing for students and teachers, the calls for a return to a (romanticized) common curriculum, the reduction of educational goals to those primarily of business and industry, the proposals for voucher or "choice" plans, the pressure to legislate morality and values from the right, and the introduction of state-mandated content on "free enterprise" and the like. Similar tendencies are more than a little evident in Britain and in some cases are even more advanced.

All of this has brought about countervailing movements in the schools. The slower but still interesting growth of more democratically run schools—the growth of practices and policies that give community groups and teachers considerably more authority in text selection and curriculum determination, in teaching strategy, in the use of funds, in administration, and in developing more flexible and less authoritarian evaluation schemes—is providing some cause for optimism in the midst of the conservative restoration.[7]

Even with these positive signs, however, it is clear that the New Right has been able to rearticulate traditional political and cultural themes. In so doing, it has often effectively mobilized a mass base of adherents. Among its most powerful causes and effects has been the growing feeling of disaffection about public schooling among conservative groups. Large numbers of parents and other people no longer trust either the institutions or the teachers and administrators in them to make "correct" decisions about what should be taught and how to teach it. The rapid growth of evangelical schooling, of censorship, and of textbook controversies, and the emerging tendency of many parents to teach their children at home rather than send them to state-supported schools are clear indications of this loss of legitimacy.[8]

The ideology that stands behind this is often very complex. It combines a commitment to both the "traditional family" and clear gender roles with the commitment to "traditional values" and literal religiosity. Often packed into this is also a defense of capitalist economics, patriotism, the "Western tradition," anti-communism, and a deep mistrust of the "welfare state."[9] When this ideology is applied to schooling, the result can be as simple as dissatisfaction with an occasional book or assignment. On the other hand, the result can be a major conflict that threatens to go well beyond the boundaries of our usual debates about schooling.

Few places in the United States are more well-known in this latter context than Kanawha County, West Virginia. In the mid-1970s it became the scene of one of the most explosive controversies over what schools should teach, who should decide, and what beliefs should guide our educational programs. What began as a protest by a small group of conservative parents, religious leaders, and business people over the content and design of the textbooks approved for use in local schools soon spread to include school boycotts, violence, and a wrenching split within the community that in many ways has yet to heal.

There were a number of important contributing factors that heightened tensions in West Virginia. Schools in rural areas had been recently consolidated. Class relations and relations between the country and the city were becoming increasingly tense. The lack of participation by rural parents (or many parents at all, for that matter) in text selection or in educational decision making in general had also led to increasing alienation. Furthermore, the cultural history of the region, with its fierce independence, fundamentalist religious traditions, and history of economic depression, helped create the conditions for serous unrest. Finally, Kanawha County became a cause célèbre for national right-wing groups who offered moral, legal, and organizational support to the conservative activists there.[10]

It is important to realize, then, that the controversies over "official knowledge" that usually center around what is included and excluded in textbooks really signify more profound political, economic, and cultural relations and histories. Conflicts over texts are often proxies for wider questions of power relations. They involve what people hold most dear. And, as in the case of Kawawha County, they can quickly escalate into conflicts over these deeper issues.

Yet textbooks are surely important in and of themselves. They signify—through their content *and* form—particular constructions of reality, particular ways of selecting and organizing that vast universe of possible knowledge.

They embody what Raymond Williams called the *selective tradition*—someone's selection, someone's vision of legitimate knowledge and culture, one that in the process of enfranchising one group's cultural capital disenfranchises another's.[12]

Texts are really messages to and about the future. As part of a curriculum, they participate in no less than the organized knowledge system of society. They participate in creating what a society has recognized as legitimate and truthful. They help set the canons of truthfulness and, as such, also help re-create a major reference point for what knowledge, culture, belief, and morality really *are*.[12]

Yet such a statement—even with its recognition that texts participate in constructing ideologies and ontologies—is misleading in many important ways. For it is not a "society" that has created such texts, but specific groups of people. "We" haven't built such curriculum artifacts, if "we" means simply that there is universal agreement among all of us and this is what gets to be official knowledge. In fact, the very use of the pronoun "we" simplifies matters all too much.

As Fred Inglis so cogently argues, the pronoun "we"

> smooths over the deep corrugations and ruptures caused precisely by struggle over how that authoritative and editorial "we" is going to be used. The [text], it is not melodramatic to declare, really is the battleground for an intellectual civil war, and the battle for cultural authority is a wayward, intermittingly fierce, always protracted and fervent one.[13]

Let us give one example. In the 1930s conservative groups in the United States mounted a campaign against one of the more progressive textbook series in use in schools, *Man and His Changing World* by Harold Rugg and his colleagues. This textbook became the subject of a concerted attack by the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Legion, the Advertising Federation of American, and other "neutral" groups. They charged that Rugg's books were socialist, anti-American, anti-business, and so forth. The conservative campaign was more than a little successful in forcing school districts to withdraw Rugg's series from classrooms and libraries. So successful were they that sales fell from nearly 300,000 copies in 1938 to only approximately 20,000 in 1944.[14]

We, of course, may have reservations about such texts today, not least of which would be the sexist title. But one thing that the Rugg case makes clear is that the *politics* of the textbook is not by any means something new. Current issues surrounding texts—their ideology, their very status as central definers of what we should teach, even their very effectiveness and their design—echo the past moments of these concerns that have had such a long history in so many countries.

Few aspects of schooling currently have been subject to more intense scrutiny and criticism than the textbook. Perhaps one of the most graphic descriptions is provided by A. Graham Down of the Council for Basic Education:

> Textbooks, for better or worse, dominate what students learn. They set the curriculum, and often the facts learned, in most subjects. For many students, textbooks are their first and sometimes only early exposure to books and to reading. The public regards textbooks as authoritative, accurate, and necessary. And teachers rely on them to organize lessons and structure subject matter. But the current system of textbook adoption has filled our schools with Trojan horses—glossily covered blocks of paper whose words emerge to deaden the minds of our nation's youth, and make them enemies of learning.[15]

This statement is made just as powerfully by Harriet Tyson-Bernstein, the author of a recent study of what she has called "America's textbook fiasco":

> Imagine a public policy system that is perfectly designed to produce textbooks that confuse, mislead, and profoundly bore students, while at the same time making all of the adults involved in the process look good, not only in their own eyes, but in the eyes of others. Although there are some good textbooks on the market, publishers and editors are virtually compelled by public policies and practices to create textbooks that confuse students with non sequiturs, that mislead them with misinformation, and that profoundly bore them with pointlessly arid writing.[16]

Regulation or Liberation and the Text

In order to understand these criticisms and to understand both some of the reasons why texts look the way they do and why they contain the perspectives of some groups and not those of others, we also need to realize that the world of the book has not been cut off from the world of commerce. Books are not only cultural artifacts. They are economic commodities as well. Even though texts may be vehicles of ideas, they still have to be "peddled on a market."[17] This market, however—especially in the national and international world of textbook publishing—is politically volatile, as the Kanawha County experience so clearly documented.

Texts are caught up in a complicated set of political and economic dynamics. Text publishing often is highly competitive. In the United States, where text production is a commercial enterprise situated within the vicissitudes of a capitalist market, decisions about the "bottom line" determine what books are published and for how long. Yet this situation is not just controlled by the "invisible hand" of the market. It is also largely determined by the highly visible "political" hand of state textbook-adoption policies.[18]

Nearly half of the states—most of them in the southern tier and the "sun belt"—have state textbook-adoption committees that by and large choose what texts will be purchased by the schools in that state. The economics of profit and

loss of this situation makes it imperative that publishers devote nearly all of their efforts to guaranteeing a place on these lists of approved texts. Because of this, the texts made available to the entire nation, and the knowledge considered legitimate in them, are determined by what will sell in Texas, California, Florida, and so forth. There can be no doubt that the political and ideological controversies over content in these states, controversies that were often very similar to those that surfaced in Kanawha County, have had a very real impact on what and whose knowledge is made available. It is also clear that Kanawha County was affected by and had an impact on these larger battles over legitimate knowledge.

Economic and political realities structure text publishing not only internally, however. On an international level, the major text-publishing conglomerates control the market of much of the material not only in the capitalist centers, but in many other nations as well. Cultural domination is a fact of life for millions of students throughout the world, in part because of the economic control of communication and publishing by multinational firms, in part because of the ideologies and systems of political and cultural control of new elites within former colonial countries.[19] All of this, too, has led to complicated relations and struggles over official knowledge and the text between "center" and "periphery" and within these areas as well.

We want to stress that all of this is not simply—as in the case of newly emerging nations, Kanawa County, or the Rugg textbooks—of historical interest. The controversies over the form and content of the textbook have not diminished. In fact, they have become even more heated in the United States in particular. The changing ideological climate has had a major impact on debates over what should be taught in schools and on how it should be taught and evaluated. There is considerable pressure to raise the standards of texts, to make them more "difficult," to standardize their content, to make certain that the texts place more stress on "American" themes of patriotism, free enterprise, and the "Western tradition," and to link their content to state and nationwide tests of educational achievement.

These kinds of pressures are felt not only in the United States. The text has become the center of ideological and educational conflict in a number of other countries as well. In Japan, for instance, the government approval of a right-wing history textbook that retold the story of the brutal Japanese invasion and occupation of China and Korea in a more positive light has stimulated widespread international antagonism and has led to considerable controversy in Japan as well.

Along these same lines, at the very time that the textbook has become a source of contention for conservative movements, it has stood at the center of controversy for not being progressive enough. Class, gender/sex, and race bias has been widespread in the materials. All too often, "legitimate" knowledge

does not include the historical experiences and cultural expressions of labor, women, people of color, and others who have been denied power.[20]

All of these controversies are not "simply" about the content of the books students find—or don't find—in their schools, although obviously they are about that as well. The issues involve profoundly different definitions of the common good,[21] different views about our society and where it should be heading, about cultural visions, and about our children's future. To quote Inglis again, the entire curriculum, in which the text plays so large a part, is "both the text and context in which production and values intersect; it is the twistpoint of imagination and power."[22] In the context of the politics of the textbook, it is the issue of power that should concern us the most.

The concept of power merely connotes the capacity to act and to do so effectively. However, in the ways we use the idea of power in our daily discourse, "the word comes on strongly and menacingly, and its presence is duly fearful."[23] This "dark side" of power is, of course, complemented by a more positive vision. Here, power is seen as connected to a people acting democratically and collectively, in the open, for the best ideals.[24] It is this dual concept of power that concerns us here, both at the level of theory (how we think about the relationship between legitimate knowledge and power) and practice (how texts actually embody this relationship). Both the positive and the negative senses of power are essential for us to understand these relationships. Taken together, they signify that arguments about textbooks are really a form of *cultural politics*. They involve the very nature of the connections between cultural visions and differential power.

This, of course, is not new to anyone who has been interested in the history of the relationship among books, literacy, and popular movements. Books—and one's ability to read them—have themselves been inherently caught up in cultural politics. Take the case of Voltaire, that leader of the Enlightenment who so wanted to become a member of the nobility. For him, the Enlightenment should begin with the "grands." Only when it had captured the hearts and minds of society's commanding heights could it concern itself with the masses below. But for Voltaire and many of his followers, one warning should be taken very seriously. One should take care to prevent the masses from learning to read.[25]

For others, teaching "the masses" to read could have a more "beneficial" effect. It enables a "civilizing" process, in which dominated groups would be made more moral, more obedient, more influenced by "real culture."[26] And for still others, such literacy could bring social transformation in its wake. It could lead to a "critical literacy," one that would be part of larger movements for a more democratic culture, economy, and polity.[27] The dual sense of the power of the text emerges clearly here.

Thus, activities that we now ask students to engage in every day, activities as "simple" and basic as reading and writing, can be at one and the same

time forms of regulation and exploitation *and* potential modes of resistance, celebration, and solidarity. Here, we are reminded of Caliban's cry, "You taught me language; and my profit on't is, I know how to curse."[28]

This contradictory sense of the politics of the book is made clearer if we go into the classrooms of the past. For example, texts have often been related to forms of bureaucratic regulation of the lives of both teachers and students. Thus, one teacher in Boston in 1899 relates a story of what happened in her first year of teaching during an observation by the school principal. As the teacher rather proudly watched one of her children read aloud an assigned lesson from the text, the principal was less than pleased with the performance of the teacher or her pupil. In the words of the teacher:

> The proper way to read in the public school in 1899 was to say, "page 35, chapter 4" and holding the book in the right hand, with the toes pointing at an angle of forty-five degrees, the head held straight and high, the eyes looking directly ahead, the pupil would lift up his voice and struggle in loud, unnatural tones. Now, I had attended to the position of the toes, the right arm, and the nose, but had failed to enforce the mentioning of page and chapter.[29]

Here, the text participates in both bodily and ideological regulation. The textbook in this instance is part of a system of enforcing a sense of duty, morality, and cultural correctness. Yet, historically, teachers struggled both *for* and *against* the standardized text. Faced with large classes, difficult working conditions, insufficient training, and—even more important—little time to prepare lessons for the vast array of subjects and students they were responsible for, teachers often looked upon texts not necessarily as impositions but as essential tools. For young women elementary-school teachers, the text helped to prevent exploitation.[30] It solved a multitude of practical problems. It led not only to de-skilling, but time to become more skilled as a teacher as well.[31] Thus, there were demands for standardized texts by teachers even in the face of what happened to that teacher in Boston and to so many others.

This struggle over texts was linked to broader concerns about who should control the curriculum in schools. Teachers, especially those most politically active, constantly sought to have a say in what they taught. This was seen as part of a larger fight for democratic rights. Margaret Haley, for instance, one of the leaders of the first teachers union in the United States, saw a great need for teachers to work against the tendency of making the teacher "a mere factory hand, whose duty it is to carry out mechanically and unquestioningly the ideas and orders of those clothed with authority of position."[32] Teachers had to fight against the de-skilling or, as she called it, "factoryizing" methods of control sponsored by administrative and industrial leaders. One of the reasons she was so strongly in favor of teachers' councils as mechanisms of control of schools was that this would considerably reduce the immense power over teaching and

texts that administrators then possessed. Quoting John Dewey with approval, Haley wrote:

> If there is a single public-school system in the United States where there is official and constitutional provision made for submitting questions of methods, of discipline and teaching, and the questions of curriculum, textbooks, etc. to the discussion of those actually engaged in the work of teaching, that fact has escaped my notice.[33]

In this instance, teacher control over the choice of textbooks and how they were to be used was part of a more extensive movement to enhance the democratic rights of teachers on the job. Without such teacher control, teachers would be the equivalent of factory workers whose every move was determined by management.

These points about the contradictory relationships that teachers have had with texts and the way such books de-power and em-power at different moments (and perhaps at the same time) document something of importance. It is too easy to see a cultural practice or a book as totally carrying its politics around with it, "as if written on its brow for ever and a day." Rather, its political functioning "depends on the network of social and ideological relations" in which it participates.[34] Textbook writing, reading, and use can be retrogressive or progressive (and sometimes some combination of both) depending on the social context. Textbooks can be fought because they are part of a system of moral regulation. They can be championed both as providing essential assistance in the labor of teaching and as part of a larger strategy of democratization.

What textbooks do, the social roles they play for different groups, is then *very complicated.* This has important implications not only for the politics of how and by whom textbooks are used, but for the politics of the internal qualities, the content and organization, of the text. Just as crucially, it also has an immense bearing on how people actually read and interpret the text. It is to these issues that we now wish to turn.

The Politics of Cultural Incorporation

We cannot assume that because so much of education has been linked to processes of class, gender/sex, and race stratification,[35] all of the knowledge chosen to be included in texts simply represents relations of, say, cultural domination or only includes the knowledge of dominant groups. This point requires that we speak theoretically and politically here, for all too many critical analyses of school knowledge—of what is included and excluded in the overt and hidden curricula of the school—take the easy way out. Reductive analysis comes cheap. Reality, however, is complex. Let us look at this in more detail.

Each of us has argued in considerable detail elsewhere that the selection and organization of knowledge for schools is an ideological process, one that

serves the interests of particular classes and social groups.[36] However, as we just noted, this does not mean that the entire corpus of school knowledge is "a mirror reflection of ruling class ideas, imposed in an unmediated and coercive manner." Instead, "the processes of cultural incorporation are dynamic, reflecting both continuities and contradictions of that dominant culture and the continual remaking and relegitimation of that culture's plausibility system."[37] Curricula are not imposed in countries like the United States. Rather, they are the products of often intense conflicts, negotiations, and attempts at rebuilding hegemonic control by actually incorporating the knowledge and perspectives of the less powerful under the umbrella of the discourse of dominant groups.

This is clear in the case of the textbook. As disenfranchised groups have fought to have their knowledge take center stage in the debates over cultural legitimacy, one trend has dominated in text production. In essence, very little tends to be dropped from textbooks. Major ideological frameworks do not get markedly changed. Textbook publishers are under considerable and constant pressure to include *more* in their books. Progressive *items* are perhaps mentioned, then, but not developed in depth.[38] Dominance is partly maintained here through compromise and the process of "mentioning."

Tony Bennett's discussion of the process by which dominant cultures actually become dominant is worth quoting at length here:

> Dominant culture gains a purchase not in being imposed, as an alien external force, on to the cultures of subordinate groups, but by reaching into these cultures, reshaping them, hooking them and, with them, the people whose consciousness and experience is defined in their terms, into an association with the values and ideologies of the ruling groups in society. Such processes neither erase the cultures of subordinate groups, nor do they rob "the people" of their "true culture": what they do do is shuffle those cultures on to an ideological and cultural terrain in which they can be disconnected from whatever radical impulses which may (but need not) have fuelled them and be connected to more conservative or, often, downright reactionary cultural and ideological tendencies.[39]

In some cases, "mentioning" may operate in exactly this way, integrating selective elements into the dominant tradition by bringing them into close association with the values of powerful groups. There will be times, however, when such a strategy will not be successful. Oppositional cultures may at times use elements of the dominant culture against such groups. Bennett goes on, describing how oppositional cultures operate, as well:

> Similarly, resistance to the dominant culture does not take the form of launching against it a ready-formed, constantly simmering oppositional culture—always there, but in need of being turned up from time to time. Oppositional cultural values are formed and take shape only in the context of their struggle with the dominant culture, a struggle which may borrow some of its resources from that culture and which must concede some ground to it if it is to be able to connect with it—and thereby with those whose consciousness and experience is partly shaped by it—in order, by turning it back upon itself, to peel it away, to create a space within and against it in which contradictory values can echo, reverberate and be heard.[40]

Some texts may, in fact, have such progressive "echoes" within them. These are victories in the politics of official knowledge, not only defeats.

Sometimes, of course, not only do people succeed in creating some space where such contradictory values can indeed "echo, reverberate and be heard," but also transform the entire social space. They create entirely new kinds of governments, new possibilities for democratic political, economic, and cultural arrangements. In these situations, the role of education takes on even more importance, since new knowledge, new ethics, and a new reality seek to replace the old. This is one of the reasons that those of us committed to cultures that are more participatory and democratic, both inside and outside schools, must give serious attention to changes in official knowledge in those nations that have sought to overthrow their colonial or elitist heritage. Here, the politics of the text takes on special importance, because the textbook often represents an overt attempt to help create a new cultural reality.

New social contexts, new processes of text creation, a new cultural politics, the transformation of authority relations, and new ways of reading texts—all of this can evolve and help usher in a positive rather than a negative sense of the power of the text. Less regulatory and more emancipatory relations of texts to real people can begin to evolve, a possibility made real in many of the programs of critical literacy that have had such a positive impact in nations throughout the world. Here people help create their own "texts," ones that signify their emerging power in the control of their own destinies.

However, we should not be overly romantic here. Such transformations of cultural authority and mechanisms of control and incorporation will not be easy.

For example, the ideas and values of a people are certainly not directly prescribed by the conceptions of the world of dominant groups, and it is just as certain that there are many instances in which people will be successful in creating realistic and workable alternatives to the culture and texts in dominance. Yet we do need to acknowledge that the social distribution of what is considered legitimate knowledge *is* skewed in many nations. The social institutions directly concerned with the "transmission" of this knowledge, such as schools and the media, *are* grounded in and structured by the class, gender, and race inequalities that organize the society in which people live. The area of symbolic production is not divorced from the unequal relations of power that structure other spheres.[41]

Speaking only of class relations—but much the same could be said about race and gender—Stuart Hall, one of the most insightful analysts of cultural politics, puts it this way:

> Ruling or dominant conceptions of the world do not directly prescribe the mental content of the illusions that supposedly fill the heads of dominated classes. But the circle of dominant ideas *does* accumulate the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others; its classifications do acquire not only the constraining power of dominance over other modes of thought but also the initial authority of habit and instinct. It becomes the horizon of the taken-for-granted: what the world is and how it works, for all practical purposes. Ruling ideas may dominate other conceptions of the social world by setting the limit on what will appear as rational, reasonable, credible, indeed sayable or thinkable within the given vocabularies of motive and action available to us. Their dominance lies precisely in the power they have to contain within their limits, to frame within their circumference of thought, the reasoning and calculation of other social groups.[42]

In the United States, there has been a movement of exactly this kind. Dominant groups—really a coalition of economic modernizers, what has been called the "old humanists," and neoconservative intellectuals—have attempted to create an ideological consensus around the return to traditional knowledge: the "great books" and "great ideas" of the "Western tradition" will preserve democracy. By returning to the common culture that has made this nation great schools will increase student achievement and discipline, increase our international competitiveness, and ultimately reduce unemployment and poverty.

Mirrored in the problematic educational and cultural visions of volumes such as Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* and E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*,[43] this position is probably best represented in quotations from former secretary of education William Bennett. In his view, we are finally emerging out of a crisis in which "we neglected and denied much of the best in American education." For a period, "we simply stopped doing the right things [and] allowed an assault on intellectual and moral standards." This assault on the current state of education has led schools to fall away from "the principles of our tradition."[44]

Yet, for Bennett, "the people" have now risen up. "The 1980's gave birth to a grass roots movement for educational reform that has generated a renewed commitment to excellence, character, and fundamentals." Because of this, "we have reason for optimism."[45] Why? Because

> the national debate on education is now focused on truly important matters: mastering the basics; . . . insisting on high standards and expectations; ensuring discipline in the classroom; conveying a grasp of our moral and political principles; and nurturing the character of our young.[46]

Notice the use of "we," "the people," here. Notice as well the assumed consensus on "basics" and "fundamentals" and the romanticization of the past both in schools and the larger society. The use of these terms, the attempt to bring people in under the ideological umbrella of the conservative restoration,

is rhetorically very clever. As many people in the United States, Britain, and elsewhere—where rightist governments have been very active in transforming what education is about—have begun to realize, however, this ideological incorporation is having no small measure of success at the level of policy, at the level of whose knowledge and values are to be taught.[47]

If this movement has its way, the texts made available and the knowledge included in them will surely represent a major loss for many of the groups who have had successes in bringing their knowledge and culture more directly into the body of legitimate content in schools. Just as surely, the ideologies that will dominate the official knowledge will represent a considerably more elitist orientation than what we have now.

And yet, perhaps surely is not the correct word here. The situation is actually more complex than this, something we have learned from many of the newer methods of interpreting how social messages are actually "found" in texts.

Allan Luke has dealt with such issues very persuasively, and it would be best to quote him at length here:

> A major pitfall of research in the sociology of curriculum has been its willingness to accept text form as a mere adjunct means for the delivery of ideological content: the former described in terms of dominant metaphors, images, or key ideas; the latter described in terms of the sum total of values, beliefs, and ideas which might be seen to constitute a false consciousness. For much content analysis presumes that text mirrors or reflects a particular ideological position, which in turn can be connected to specific class interests. . . . It is predicated on the possibility of a one-to-one identification of school knowledge with textually represented ideas of the dominant classes. Even those critics who have recognized that the ideology encoded in curricular texts may reflect the internally contradictory character of a dominant culture have tended to neglect the need for a more complex model of text analysis, one that does not suppose that texts are simply readable, literal representations of "someone else's" version of social reality, objective knowledge and human relations. For texts do not always mean or communicate what they say.[48]

These are important points for they imply that we need more sophisticated and nuanced models of textual analysis. While we should certainly *not* be at all sanguine about the effects of the conservative restoration on texts and the curriculum, if texts do not simply represent dominant beliefs in some straightforward way, and if dominant cultures contain contradictions, fissures, and even elements of the culture of popular groups, then our readings of what knowledge is "in" texts cannot be done by the application of a simple formula.

We can claim, for instance, that the meaning of a text is not necessarily intrinsic to it. As poststructuralist theories would have it, meaning is "the product of a system of differences into which the text is articulated." Thus, there is not "one text," but many. Any text is open to multiple readings. This

puts into doubt any claim that one can determine the meanings and politics of a text "by a straightforward encounter with the text itself." It also raises serious questions about whether one can fully understand the text by mechanically applying any interpretive procedure. Meanings, then, can be—and are—multiple and contradictory, and we must always be willing to "read" our own readings of a text, to interpret our own interpretations of what it means.[49] Answering the question of "whose knowledge" is in a text is not at all simple, it seems, although clearly the Right would very much like to reduce the range of meanings one might find.

This is true of our own interpretations of what is in textbooks. But it is just as true for the students who sit in schools and at home and read (or in many cases do not read) their texts. We want to stress this point not only at the level of theory and politics, as we have emphasized here, but also at the level of practice.

We cannot assume that what is "in" the text is actually taught. Nor can we assume that what is taught is actually learned. Teachers have a long history of mediating and transforming text material when they employ it in classrooms. Students bring their own classed, raced, gendered, and sexual biographies with them as well. They, too, selectively accept, reinterpret, and reject what counts as legitimate knowledge. As critical ethnographies of schools have shown, students (and teachers) are not empty vessels into which knowledge is poured. Rather than participants in what Freire has called "banking" education[50] students are active constructors of the meanings of the education they encounter.[51]

We can talk about three ways in which people can potentially respond to a text: dominated, negotiated,and oppositional. In the dominated reading of a text, one accepts the messages at face value. In a negotiated response, the reader may dispute a particular claim, but accept the overall tendencies or interpretations of a text. Finally, an oppositional response rejects these dominant tendencies and interpretations. The reader "repositions" herself or himself in relation to the text and takes on the position of the oppressed.[52] These are, of course, no more than ideal types, and many responses will be a contradictary combination of all three. But the point is not only that texts themselves have contradictory elements, but also that audiences *construct* their own responses to texts. They do not passively receive texts, but actually read them based on their own class, race, gender/sex, and religious experiences.

An immense amount of work needs to be done on student acceptance, interpretation, reinterpretation, and partial and/or total rejection of texts. While there is a tradition of such research,much of it quite good, most of this in education is done in an overly psychologized manner. It is more concerned with questions of learning and achievement than it is with the equally as important and prior issues of whose knowledge it is that students are learning, negotiating, or opposing and what the socio-cultural roots and effects are of such processes. Yet we simply cannot fully understand the power of texts, what they do ideologically and politically (or educationally, for that matter), unless we take very seriously the way students actually read them—not only as individuals but also as members of social groups with their own particular cultures and histories.[53] For every textbook, then, there are multiple texts—contradictions within it, multiple readings of it, and different uses to which it will be put. Texts—be they the standardized grade-level-specific books so beloved by school systems or the novels, trade books, and alternative materials that teachers use either to supplement these books or simply to replace them—are part of a complex story of cultural politics. They can signify authority (not always legitimate) or freedom.

To recognize this, then, is also to recognize that our task as critically and democratically minded educators is itself a political one. We must acknowledge and understand the tremendous capacity of dominant institutions to regenerate themselves "not only in their material foundations and structures but in the hearts and minds of people." Yet, at the very same time, we need never to lose sight of the power of popular organizations—of real people—to struggle, resist, and transform them.[54] Cultural authority, that which counts as legitimate knowledge, the norms and values represented in the officially sponsored curriculum of the school—all of these serve as important arenas in which the positive and negative relations of power surrounding the text will work themselves out. And all of them involve the hopes and dreams of real people in real institutions, in real relations of inequality.

From all that we have said here, it should be clear that we oppose the idea that there can be one textual authority, one definitive set of "facts" divorced from their context of power relations. A "common culture" can never be an extension to everyone of what a minority means and believe. Rather, and crucially, it requires not the stipulation and incorporation within textbooks of lists and concepts that make us all "culturally literate," *but the creation of the conditions necessary for all people to participate in the creation and recreation of meanings and values.* It requires a democratic process in which all people—not simply those who see themselves as the intellectual guardians of the "Western tradition"—can be involved in the deliberation of what is important.[55] It should go without saying that this necessitates the removal of the very real material obstacles—unequal power, wealth, time for reflection—that stand in the way of such participation.[56]

The very idea that there is one set of values that must guide the "selective tradition" can be a great danger, especially in contexts of differential power. Take, as one example, a famous line that was inscribed on an equally famous public building. It read: "There is one road to freedom. Its milestones are obedience, diligence, honesty, order, cleanliness, temperance, truth, sacrifice, and love of country." Many people may perhaps agree with much of the sentiment represented by these words, and it may be of some interest to them that

the building on which they appeared was in the administration block of the concentration camp at Dachau.[57]

Multiple Perspectives on the Text

Each of the chapters that follow takes up important elements of this discussion of the politics of the textbook. Some are concerned with the political and economic realities of text publishing. Others delve into the cultural and ideological content and form of texts of various kinds, paying attention to the politics of cultural authority and the selective tradition, and to how texts are actually read. Still others focus not only on the national but also on the international context. Our aim in this volume has not been to give the final word on any of the debates about the politics of the text. Indeed, no one book could, or should, do such a thing. Rather, we have sought to open up discussions that need to take place, to extend previous analyses and to illuminate some of the hidden realities behind the dominance of the textbook. We are concerned as well that a sense of the very possibility of a different politics of official knowledge is enhanced. Because of this, the book closes with an example of a more liberating cultural politics that sought to democratize cultural authority and the text in practice.

Some of the chapters that follow will raise very practical pedagogical and curricular problems. Others will cause us to pay greater attention to the power of political, economic, and ideological dynamics than we may have in the past. A number of the chapters ask us to become considerably more sophisticated theoretically in our analyses of the relationship between culture and power in texts themselves. Taken together, the chapters included here provide us with a much clearer picture of the politics of knowledge, how texts work, and why the look the way they do.

In Chapter 2, setting the stage for many of the chapters that follow, Michael Apple investigates how the selective tradition is produced by the complex political and economic circumstances surrounding the world of textbook publishing. He traces part of the history of these conditions and then goes inside the publishing industry to show how internal and external pressures and "rational" decisions cause textbooks to look the way they do. In the process, he asks us to go beyond the overly reductive analyses that have often dominated our investigations of the relationship between power and culture.

In Chapter 3, Linda Christian-Smith examines the growing technologization of publishing. She illuminates the effects of the computerization of the entire book production process on the people who actually work on producing the book itself. Of particular importance is her analysis of the impact of such changes on women workers. Her discussion should make us much less sanguine about the "benefits" of the new technology in textbook publishing.

The politics of the textbook is directly related to the role of government

agencies in producing, selecting, and legitimating the books that dominate the curriculum. In Chapter 4, Dan Marshall goes behind the scenes in Texas, one of the states that—because of its policy of state-wide approval—plays a profound role in determining the form and content of the texts that are sold in the entire nation. He looks in particular at how members of the textbook-adoption committee function and how pressure groups work in influencing government and publishers' decisions.

Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant, in Chapter 5, take us inside the major textbooks now being used in many classrooms throughout the United States. They engage in a detailed content analysis of recent texts in social studies, reading and language arts, science, and mathematics. Not content to stress one relation of power in the knowledge the texts present, they analyze the ways race, class, gender, and disability are treated. Their conclusions are truly disturbing in many ways.

For many people in the United States, the basal reader was the first and most important textbook of their daily lives in schools. Among the most influential of these texts were the famous (or infamous, depending on your point of view) "Dick and Jane readers." Entire generations of students were faced with the definitions of reading and literacy embodied in these books. It is not widely known that there was a separate version of these texts for Catholic schools. In Chapter 6, Allan Luke engages in a disciplined and insightful historical and semiotic reading of the Catholic Dick-and-Jane readers—of their visions of authority, community, gender, race, and social conflict. He provides an important model of textual analysis that goes beyond our traditional forms.

There has not been sufficient attention paid to the creation of oppositional knowledge and voices. Kenneth Teitelbaum, in Chapter 7, brings some of this to life for us. Even when the dominant ideological tendencies in the content of schooling did not allow for adequate representation of working people and the vast majority of the American people, this did not mean that progressive educators and community members stood by and accepted this situation. One important example of such "counter-hegemonic" practices was the formation of "Socialist Sunday Schools" in many cities in the United States. Teitelbaum provides a unique picture of the material that was developed to teach students in these schools about alternative forms of economic, political, and cultural life. While the material itself was often contradictory, it serves as a crucial reminder of past struggles to alter the politics of official knowledge.

Often we assume that the standardized textbook is the only or the primary means of establishing legitimate knowledge in the classroom. Yet many teachers, distressed by the treatment or invisibility of oppressed groups in the texts, bring in other voices to counter the utter lack of serious attention to, say, the vibrant cultures of people of color. In Chapter 8, Joel Taxel focuses on the work of Mildred Taylor, a novelist who writes about the African American experience for young readers. For Taxel, progressive educators can overcome

the selective tradition by uncovering the voices of opposition in children's literature that have been too often silenced in the past, and by guaranteeing their availability to our students.

Not all such trade books are oppositional, to say the least. One of the fastest growing segments of book publishing has been romance novels. Not only are millions of these sold worldwide to adult readers. Millions more are published for the teenage market. Such adolescent romance novels are aimed especially at young women. These books have not remained outside the classroom door. Many teachers are using them as what are called H/Ls—high interest, low ability—for their students who are not doing well in reading. The ideological orientation of such books is often less than liberating in terms of gender, race, and class relations. Yet young women read such novels in contradictory ways, with contradictory effects. Linda Christian-Smith, in Chapter 9, discusses adolescent romance novels and provides us with a rich picture of the construction of textual meaning by their teenage readers. Gender, class, and race contradictions will be very evident.

The texts about which we should be concerned are not only those found in schools. We need to pay considerable attention to those "texts," widely sponsored, reviewed, and read, that try to convince "the public" that the wrong knowledge is now being taught in our educational institutions. The conservative restoration is now very advanced in many nations. Part of its politics is cultural and ideological. Not only does it want to transform what education is for, it wants to dramatically alter what counts as legitimate knowledge in the process. In Chapter 10, Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux engage in a detailed critical deconstruction of the arguments put forward by Allan Bloom and E. D. Hirsch as to what we should teach. Many people have been strongly influenced by positions taken by Bloom and by Hirsch, and pressure is being placed on education at all levels to have texts that are "culturally literate" and embody the "wisdom" of the "Western tradition." The arguments of Aronowitz and Giroux will assist all of us in countering these tendencies.

In Chapter 11, Philip Altbach directs our attention to the international dimensions of publishing in general and to textbook publishing in particular. He pays a good deal of attention, and justifiably so, to the role of multinational publishers in maintaining first-world dominance and in making it increasingly more difficult for cultural independence and autonomy to develop in "peripheral" nations. He also enables us to see the possibilities and dangers that may arise in this situation over time.

When social movements transform a repressive situation, ushering in new and more democratic governments, education itself is subject to major transformations as well. In Chapter 12, Didacus Jules, the former permanent secretary for education in the Bishop government in Grenada, describes the critical shifts in the process and politics of text production and content after the initial success of the democratic movement there. We have much to learn from the progressive

tendencies such attempts involve. Yet we also need to remember the fragility of such democratic movements in the context of international economic, political, and cultural dominance. After all, the United States sought to ensure that the Grenadian experiment in democracy was short-lived. Jules's discussion does suggest the very possibility of difference, however—surely an important hope in the current context.

The chapters we have described are themselves "texts" that are open to multiple readings, to multiple interpretations and responses. Because of this, and because all of the authors included here are committed to a more democratic politics of knowledge, we urge you to write to us with comments, disagreements, questions, or even affirmations about what you have read in this volume. Only in this way will we too learn about how the cultural politics of books actually works.

Notes

1. See, for example, Michael W. Apple and Lois Weis, eds., *Ideology and Practice in Schooling* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).
2. For a current representative sample of the varied kinds of studies being done on the textbook, see Arthur Woodward, David L. Elliot, and Kathleen Carter Nagel, eds., *Textbooks in School and Society* (New York: Garland, 1988).
3. Fred Inglis, *Popular Culture and Political Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), p. 9.
4. Allan Luke, *Literacy, Textbooks and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1988), pp. 27–29.
5. Michael W. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990); idem, *Education and Power* (New York: Routledge, 1985); and idem, *Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education* (New York: Routledge, 1986).
6. Michael W. Apple, "Redefining Equality: Authoritarian Populism and the Conservative Restoration," *Teachers College Record* 90 (Winter 1988): 167–84.
7. Ann Bastian, Norm Fruchter, Marilyn Gittell, Colin Greer, and Kenneth Haskins, *Choosing Equality: The Case for Democratic Schooling* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).
8. See, for example, Susan Rose, *Keeping Them Out of the Hands of Satan* (New York: Routledge, 1988).
9. Allen Hunter, *Children in the Service of Conservation* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Institute for Legal Studies, 1988).
10. James Moffett, *Storm in the Mountains* (Carbondale, Ill., Southern Illinois University Press, 1988).
11. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961). See also Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum.*
12. Fred Inglis, *The Management of Ignorance: A Political Theory of The Curriculum* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 22–23.
13. Ibid., p. 23.
14. Miriam Schipper, "Textbook Controversy: Past and Present," *New York University Education*

Quarterly 14 (Spring/Summer 1983): 31–36. The continuing controversy over *Our Bodies, Our Selves* in schools documents the immense power of gender in struggles over texts as well. Class is not the only dynamic that operates here. We need to stress the historical and current importance of race and gender in conflicts over official knowledge.

15. A. Graham Down, "Preface" to Harriet Tyson-Bernstein, *A Conspiracy of Good Intentions: America's Textbook Fiasco* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Basic Education, 1988), p. viii.
16. Harriet Tyson-Bernstein, *A Conspiracy of Good Intentions*, p. 3.
17. Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 199.
18. For a history of the social roots of such adoption policies, see Michael W. Apple, "Regulating the Text: The Socio/Historical Roots of State Control." *Educational Policy* 3 (June 1989): 107–23.
19. The issues surrounding cultural imperialism and colonialism are nicely laid out in Philip Altbach and Gail Kelly, eds., *Education and the Colonial Experience* (New York: Transaction Books, 1984). For an excellent discussion of international relations over texts and knowledge, see Philip Altbach, *The Knowledge Context* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988).
20. For some of the most elegant discussion of how we need to think about these "cultural silences," see Leslie Roman and Linda Christian-Smith with Elizabeth Ellsworth, eds., *Becoming Feminine: The Politics of Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1988).
21. Marcus Raskin, *The Common Good* (New York: Routledge, 1986).
22. Inglis, *The Management of Ignorance*, p. 142.
23. Inglis, *Popular Culture and Political Power*, p. 4.
24. Ibid.
25. Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*, p. 13.
26. Janet Batsleer, Tony Davies, Rebecca O'Rourke, and Chris Weedon, *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class* (New York: Methuen, 1985).
27. Colin Lankshear with Moira Lawler, *Literacy, Schooling and Revolution* (Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1987).
28. Batsleer, Davies, O'Rourke, and Weedon, *Rewriting English*, p. 5.
29. James W. Fraser, "Agents of Democracy: Urban Elementary School Teachers and the Conditions of Teaching," in *American Teachers: Histories of a Profession at Work*, ed. Donald Warren (New York: Macmillan, 1989), p. 128.
30. Apple, *Teachers and Texts*.
31. For further discussion of deskilling and reskilling, see Apple, *Education and Power*.
32. Margaret Haley, quoted in Fraser, "Agents of Democracy," p. 128.
33. Haley, quoted in ibid., p. 138.
34. Tony Bennett, "Introduction: Popular Culture and 'the Turn to Gramsci,' " in *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, ed. Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacott (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986), p. xvi.
35. The literature here is voluminous. For a more extended treatment see Apple, *Education and Power;* and Cameron McCarthy and Michael W. Apple, "Race, Class and Gender in American Educational Research," *Class, Race and Gender in American Education*, ed. Lois Weis (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989).

36. See Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, and Linda Christian-Smith, *Becoming a Woman Through Romance* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
37. Luke, *Literacy, Textbooks and Ideology*, p. 24.
38. Tyson-Bernstein, *A Conspiracy of Good Intentions*, p. 18.
39. Tony Bennett, "The Politics of the 'Popular' and Popular Culture," in Bennett, Mercer and Woolacott, eds., *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, p. 19.
40. Ibid.
41. Stuart Hall, "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism Among the Theorists," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 44.
42. Ibid.
43. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), and E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1986).
44. William Bennett, *Our Children and Our Country* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 9.
45. Ibid., p. 10.
46. Ibid.
47. Apple, "Redefining Equality."
48. Luke, *Literacy, Textbooks and Ideology*, pp. 29–30.
49. Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson, "Introduction: The Territory of Marxism," in Nelson and Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, p. 8.
50. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973).
51. See, for example, Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); Angela McRobbie, "Working-Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity," in *Women Take Issue*, ed. Women's Studies Group (London: Hutchinson, 1978), pp. 96–108; Robert Everhart, *Reading, Writing and Resistance* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983); Lois Weis, *Between Two Worlds* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985); and Bonnie Trudell, *Constructing the Sexuality Curriculum-in-Use* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1988). The list could, and should, be continued.
52. Tania Modleski, "Introduction," in *Studies in Entertainment* (Bloomington, Ind., Indiana University Press, 1986), p. xi.
53. See Elizabeth Ellsworth, "Illicit Pleasures: Feminist Spectators and *Personal Best*," in Roman and Christian-Smith with Ellsworth, *Becoming Feminine*, pp. 102–19; Elizabeth Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?" *Harvard Educational Review* 59 (August 1989): 297–324; and Christian-Smith, *Becoming a Woman through Romance*.
54. Batsleer, Davies, O'Rourke, and Weedon, *Rewriting English*, p. 5.
55. This is discussed in more detail in the new preface to the second edition of Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*.
56. Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope* (New York: Verso, 1989), pp. 37–38.
57. David Horne, *The Public Culture* (Dover, N.H.: Pluto Press, 1986), p. 76.