

ASSESSMENT AS WORK:

An Institutional Ethnography of Entry-Level Assessment
in a British Columbia Community College

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the social relations inherent in entry-level assessment practices in a British Columbia community college.

In advanced capitalist political economies, education is a major site reproducing a hierarchical division of labour, and class and gender inequalities which, in turn, has become organized increasingly through the state. As a component of educational apparatuses, community colleges reflect the contradictions inherent in capitalist political economies. The educational practices within the college contribute to the reproduction of capitalist social relations by promoting liberal-democratic ideologies of access, equality, and social mobility while reproducing differential and unequal labour power demanded by corporations and other employers.

Within the colleges, a hegemonic solution to the contradiction between access and limited educational resources is entry-level assessment which, within liberal-education professional discourse, is widely recognized by educators, college administrators, and the public as a legitimate educational tool. Its use is justified, in part, by its apparent ability to accommodate the range of goals and aspirations of potential community college students by providing a mechanism for access to a wide range of educational opportunities.

Following a framework outlined by Dorothy Smith, this thesis presents an institutional ethnographic account of entry-level English assessment practices at four interrelated analytical levels: relations between examinees and assessment workers; relations between assessment workers and the work organization of the college; the relation between assessment work and professional discourse; and the relation between assessment work and the political and bureaucratic organization of education, with specific focus on British Columbia. At each level specific practices are examined to reveal their connection to the ruling relations. Assessment work contributes to the reproduction of differentiated labour power through its gatekeeping role. The thesis concludes by discussing the implications for further entry-level assessment practices.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a prevailing view in our society that public education (a "liberal" education) is an activity necessary for the transmission of social knowledge from one generation to the next and as a means for individuals to develop their potential. Inherent within this view are assumptions that as individuals develop their potential(s) and "move up" in the social hierarchy their individual development translates into societal advancement. That is, at a "national level, [the] perceived effects of [education] on the individual are extended to society as a whole" (Carnoy, 1989: 445). Education is thus valued for its individual and social benefits. Such sentiments are evident in publicly expressed education policy statements. For example, the "mission" of the school system (at the elementary and secondary levels) in British Columbia is stated as follows:

The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy (Brummet, 1989: 8).

Given this connection between individual development and societal advancement (e.g., a "healthy society") it follows then, that providing individuals with opportunities to develop their potentials is, not only desirable but necessary. An important development in the provision of educational opportunities has been the creation of community colleges.

Community colleges in British Columbia were created by the Social Credit government in the 1960s to serve several needs: to offer the first two years of university level courses, to provide continuing education for adults, and to provide vocational and educational training opportunities. Community colleges, according to Kilian (1985: 135), provided a "wonderful opportunity to pursue higher education" by offering "access to post-secondary programs for enormous numbers of people who could never hope to enter university, women embarking on new careers, working class youths, [and] immigrants".

The Ministry of Post-Secondary Education (1986: 3) [now called the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology] states that the mission of the college system, in British Columbia, is to "provide educational opportunities that will help adults meet continuing and changing individual and societal needs". There is an obvious relation between this statement, at the post-secondary level, and the one expressed above at the elementary and secondary levels. The repetition of mission statements over time and between bureaucratic levels of the Social Credit government indicates the extent to which the individual/societal connection is expressed in the prevailing view of liberal education.

Associated with the notions of individual development, a "healthy society", and the provision of educational

opportunities are the interrelated ideologies of access, mobility and equality. These ideologies are abstract concepts expressing the common relationship between education and society. Education is widely acknowledged as the route for people to acquire (or achieve) economic and social success. Access to educational opportunities, in the prevailing view, is an avenue to well-paying jobs that enables individuals to improve their socio-economic status.

An illustration of the importance of access is found in a provincial government program announced in March, 1989 called "Access for All". The April, 1989, edition of the *Provincial Report* (Province of British Columbia, 1989: 5) stated that the \$690-million program would, over a six-year period, create 15,000 spaces in university programs at universities and colleges, create 1,400 new spaces and thirty new career/technical, vocational, literacy, and adult basic education programs, and make university degrees available in Kelowna, Kamloops and Nanaimo to "provide access to post-secondary education for all British Columbians". The notion of access informs the hopes, aspirations, educational goals, and I would argue, the educational activities of the populace.

"Open" admissions (accessibility) has been, and continues to be, a principal feature in the creation, and current operations, of community colleges. According to Dennison and Gallagher (1986: 74), "open admissions meant in

principle, that other things being equal, applicants could 'try' programmes of their choice regardless of previous scholastic performance and regardless of the length of time they had been out of formal education".

There are, however, significant contradictions within the education system which oppose the prevailing public expression of accessible, equal education as a means of achieving social mobility. While the principle of "open" admissions forms the basis for the public expression of accessible educational opportunities, the practice is quite different. Dennison and Gallagher (1986: 74) point out that:

In some cases, it was obvious that applicants had no reasonable chance of succeeding in the programmes of their choice, and they were denied admission until they had successfully completed 'make-up' work that would indicate a reasonable chance of success. In other cases, the demands for some programmes far exceeded the ability of the college to respond properly, and so admission quotas were used, with those applicants with the greatest chance of success commonly being given preference over more high-risk applicants.

The prevailing view of liberal education takes for granted the very conditions within which public education is practiced. Education (and the agents for its transmission - schools) is practiced within conditions engendered by capitalism.

A fundamental contradiction within capitalism is between the growth requirements of productive forces and the reproduction of social relations of education. Livingstone expresses the opposing relations as follows:

The inherent contradiction confronting education in a capitalist society functioning under the guise of a democracy is the need to appear to promote equality while successfully producing the differentiated and unequal labour power demanded by corporations and other employers (Livingstone, 1987: 596).

Denial of admission, admission quotas, high student failure (drop-out) rates, and exorbitant tuition costs are practices that lack the appearance of "equality"; therefore, they tend to be politically unacceptable methods of controlling educational access. One mechanism that resolves the problems between the rhetoric of liberal education (such as access, equality and mobility) and its practices is entry-level assessment.

Entry-level assessment refers to a stage early in the registration process in which some or all applicants are required to write a test (or tests). The results of these tests are used by the college(s) to ascertain the skill levels (or placement) of applicants, which then determines their eligibility to register in courses and programs appropriate to their demonstrated skill levels.

Entry-level assessment, within liberal education discourse, is widely recognized as a legitimate educational tool. Its use is justified, in part, by its apparent ability to accommodate the range of goals and aspirations of potential community college students by providing a mechanism for access to a wide range of educational opportunities. Colleges are thus able to meet the state's educational objectives (such as the Ministry mission

statement) and the state, in turn, is able to claim active support for the principle of "access for all".

Further justification of entry-level assessment is derived, in part, from standardized tests that may comprise part, or all, of the assessment. The utility for educators of standardized tests is widely recognized (for example see Gearheart and Willenberg, 1980; Satterly, 1981; Priestly, 1982; and Evans et al., 1986). Gearheart and Willenberg (1980: 1), for example, claim that "standardized tests provide one of the more important means of assessing a given pupil's abilities, interests, aptitudes, and level of achievement".

Standardized tests imbue the assessment process with a scientific rationale for placement decisions. For any given test, statistical evidence of its reliability and validity can be produced. Standardized tests have established norms, grade equivalents, percentiles, and stanines that make it possible for colleges to compare results among different groups of examinees. These tests are readily available and relatively inexpensive to administer. Their scientific foundation is widely recognized and accepted by instructors, students, college administrators, and the public.

There are commonly held assumptions that liberal education is secular, "free" (at least to high school) and society's educational needs are best met through competition in an individual-centred system where individual merit and

achievement are the basis for distributing educational rewards (Bleasdale, 1978; Wotherspoon, 1987; Ungerleider, 1987; and Carnoy, 1989). Entry-level assessment is considered a legitimate educational tool using established technology to make decisions affecting access to opportunities and choices within B.C.'s education system.

However, there is an extensive body of radical literature which questions not only the validity of assessment but relates it to its location in the public educational system within modern corporate capitalism. Informed and inspired by the seminal work of Marx and Engels, radical educational criticism accents the discourse of social criticism by exposing the role that schools play in reproducing economic imperatives of capitalism (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; White, 1980; Shapiro, 1982; Livingstone, 1985; and Kapferer, 1986) and legitimating ideologies of the dominant social order (Willis, 1977; Gaskell and Lazerson, 1980; Clarricoates, 1981; Wexler, et al., 1981; O'Brien, 1984; Tancred-Sheriff, 1985; Carlson, 1986; and Ungerleider, 1987).

Within the radical discourse there is a trend toward a "new" sociology. It is a form of critical analysis that emphasizes labour processes. In education this means that schools are recognized not only as the sites for transmitting knowledge but also as places of work. An emphasis on the educational institution as a "workplace"

recognizes the extent to which workers cooperate with management and among themselves to do the work. It also "illuminates the extent to which workers at all levels often resist and engage in action that is rather contradictory" (Apple, 1981: 36). Studies of "work" in education focus mainly on teachers as educational workers (e.g., Lawn and Ozga, 1981; Scarth, 1984; Apple, 1986; Giroux, 1988; and Barrett and Meaghan, 1990), the curriculum (e.g., Apple, 1979; Lynch, 1989; and Hargreaves, 1989), students (e.g., Oakes, 1986; Anderson, 1989; and Rogers, 1990), and assessments (e.g., Samuda, et al., 1987; Lewis and Samuda, 1989; Edwards, 1989; Mendelsohn, 1989; McLean, 1990; and Nagy and Moorhead, 1990). In the literature on assessment, the emphasis tends to be on instructor/student relations, where educational workers have generally been regarded as teachers/instructors. There appears, however, to be little research about those educational workers who actually conduct assessments, i.e., the assessment workers.

Assessment workers stand in a unique relation to education. While they are typically not instructors (or teachers) the work of assessment is commonly conducted in classrooms (or similar) environments with similar relations between instructor and student. Assessment workers are not typically part of management although they may make decisions (either formal or informal) that affect people in ways corresponding to management. They are a group of

educational workers, not represented in radical literature, who are neither instructors nor management but, at times, take on such roles. Assessment workers, therefore, appear to be an important link in the relation between people and education and within the educational institution in legitimating educational practices to people *before* they even sit in a classroom.

A critical examination of the work of entry-level assessment reveals relations not obvious in the daily practices of assessment. This thesis will examine the practice of entry-level assessment as "work" relations. Specifically, the emphasis on assessment "work" examines the concrete activities of assessment workers in their relations with examinees and the college. The goal is to examine the actual practices of assessment workers to discover how those activities contribute to the legitimation of entry-level assessment in a community college and, overall, how assessment work is linked to larger educational processes and to the capitalist political economy in which they are situated.

Education and school practices are closely linked to the capitalist political economy. Capitalist relations are reflected in school practices. Those practices, in turn, produce and reproduce capitalist relations. Among the capitalist relations gender, race, and class inequalities are embedded within school practices. The fundamental

antagonism between labour and capital forms the economic basis for class antagonisms. Schooling is not a neutral activity; "it is designed so that some people fail and others succeed" (Wotherspoon, 1987: 4). Class, gender, and race inequalities are reinforced by school practices that allocate limited educational resources differentially according to priorities of corporations and other employers. Entry-level assessment provides one mechanism for deciding who (and which groups) is allowed (or denied) access to educational opportunities.

An important aspect in assessment work mediates between potential students (examinees) and the college. A significant amount of assessment workers' time and energy is devoted to examinees. This is, in part, a reflection of the college's bureaucratic organization, and in part, due to the nature of community college entry-level assessment.

Entry-level assessment at the community college level differs from classroom assessment in two aspects. First, entry-level assessment is intended to measure *general* levels of skills developed outside any particular curricula. The test instrument, presumably, measures *general* abilities (e.g., reading comprehension, grammar, and writing) that are practiced in the course of examinees' daily activities. The assumption is that the more an individual reads and writes, or the extent to which reading and writing are daily activities, the corresponding skills and abilities will be

reflected in test scores. Entry-level assessment then, is closely connected to people's everyday activities.

In classroom assessment the intent is to measure *specific* skills taught in a specific curriculum. Classroom assessment is qualitatively different because the curriculum, taught (or mediated) by professional instructors/teachers, helps structure students' activities. Those activities are oriented toward learning the curriculum content and, to a certain extent, writing the assessment. Entry-level test writers do not, generally, benefit from a curriculum that structures the skills/abilities to be assessed or tutoring from professional instructors to develop their skills.

Second, examinees at the community college level are adults. They have, obviously, different experiences (within and outside of the classroom) than elementary and secondary students. This means that entry-level assessment carries qualitatively different subjective meanings for examinees than classroom assessment does for elementary or secondary students. In part, examinees' past educational experiences inform their present activity (i.e., test writing). By the college's "official" definition anyone writing an entry-level assessment does not have the necessary educational qualifications to take the desired course and/or programme. For some examinees, their past educational experiences have not been successful; they had quit school or failed to reach

the necessary minimum grades. For other examinees, time has eroded their previous educational qualifications so that, even though they may have been successful in the past (i.e., graduated Grade 12), those accomplishments are deemed by college standards to be "out-of-date". Implicit in the college definition are connotations about examinees' abilities (as formally defined) that may appear negative to some examinees. From the outset there is a connotation or implication of some deficiency in examinees' abilities. These negative connotations are, by extension, imparted to examinees' overall abilities to be competent practitioners of their own lives. In many cases, the necessity of writing an entry-level assessment in the first place affects examinees' confidence in their own abilities as human beings.

In important ways, entry-level examinees reflect the ideology of access as a means for social mobility. This makes contradictions within liberal education more visible.

Analytical Methods

The analysis is based primarily on my work experiences from 1987 to 1989 in an assessment unit within a B.C. community college. I did not initiate this research into assessment practices prior to working at the college. Instead, after working in the assessment unit for some time, I realized that processes were occurring which were not obvious to workers in their daily assessment activities or

to examinees. That is, the obvious practices of conducting assessments, scoring and interpreting the results, and placing examinees into courses/programs seemed to me to be only part of wider processes linked to the activities of the college and the college system in British Columbia. In classical Marxist terms, the overall development of this thesis reflects the primacy of concrete activity over ideas; i.e., the "production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men - the language of real life" (Marx and Engels, 1976: 42).

This thesis is guided by an approach, developed by Dorothy Smith (1987), called "institutional ethnography". Smith emphasizes the "everyday world as problematic" and uses those practical activities as the entry-point to explore social relations. Her insights provide a strategy "intended to disclose how activities are organized and how they are articulated to the social relations of the larger social and economic process" (Smith, 1987: 152). Chapter Two describes institutional ethnography in detail.

The materials for the analysis are drawn primarily from my work experiences, such as personal observations, and recollections of work activities. I also use secondary data from a variety of sources. The data sources reflect the experiential basis and limitations of institutional ethnography:

Its methods, whether of observation, interviewing, recollection of work experience, use of archives, textual analysis, or other, are constrained by the practicalities of investigation of social relations as actual practices (Smith, 1987: 160).

The analysis is limited to English assessment. There are several reasons for this limitation. First, English assessment is commonly conducted in all B.C. colleges. It provides a foundation for other assessments (e.g., English as a Second Language (ESL), mathematics, nursing, and trades) conducted within colleges. Second, the emphasis on English assessment reduces the range of assessment outcomes, providing a clearer picture of assessment activity. Third, entry-level English assessment is an area currently undergoing expansion in several colleges. Increased assessment practices have implications for future educational practices.

In the analysis I do not identify the particular college or name individuals within it. My intent is not a critical analysis of any particular assessment regime or procedure. Instead, the aim is to describe the social relations of the assessment process as a component of the larger work processes and ideological discourses in the complex division of labour characteristic of an advanced capitalist social formation.

Thesis Objectives

The major thesis objectives are to examine how entry-level English assessment activities are articulated to the capitalist social relations of the larger social and economic processes:

- a) How the immediate relations between assessment workers and examinees are structured by the processes of entry-level assessment;
- b) How the practices of assessment workers legitimate, to examinees, entry-level assessment;
- c) How professional discourse organizes the local relations of assessment workers to support the relations of ruling.

CHAPTER ONE**EDUCATION, CAPITALISM AND ASSESSMENT**

Public education is widely acknowledged as a crucial site for transmitting values, knowledge, and skills from one generation to the next, for developing human traits that contribute to economic output, social stability, and the production of new knowledge. In traditional conceptions, education teaches the practical skills necessary to become a "productive member of society" (Lennards, 1983: 435). It is therefore an important source of "social mobility" for individuals to achieve higher socio-economic status which then translates in societal growth and development. Indeed, an important element in the creation of community colleges in B.C. was offering more people access to educational opportunities, thereby promoting individual and societal development.

There is a large body of literature and research supporting the traditional view that liberal education compensates for social inequalities by being an "objective selector of intelligent and rational individuals for the highest positions in the social, political, and economic hierarchy" (Carnoy, 1989: 446). Such a view, however, tends to be misleading because it ignores or neglects the basic premise of social organization, namely, the mode of production. Alternative explanations to the "traditional" role of education that do take into account the mode of

production are provided by radical theorists.

Public schooling in capitalist political economies is a capitalist education. Radical theorists have generally been concerned with how capitalist societies reproduce themselves; radical education theorists have particularly been concerned with the relationship between public schooling and capitalism¹. In the current debate in Marxist analyses of the relationship between schooling and capitalism there are two discernable branches: reproduction and resistance. There are those theorists who stress the primacy of the economic and reproductive functions of education. The influential work here is Bowles and Gintis's (1976) examination of *Schooling in Capitalist America*². On the other hand, there are those theorists who stress cultural aspects of the relationship that engender resistance. The important work is Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour*³. The studies by Bowles and Gintis and Willis have provided valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying capitalist education while serving as a catalyst for subsequent theorizing.

This chapter will critically examine the contributions of *Schooling* and *Learning* regarding the issue of how modern public education, and assessment in particular, contributes to the totality of contemporary capitalism. Subsequent theories inspired by, and paralleling, *Schooling* and *Learning* will be examined to evaluate their respective

contributions.

Education, Capitalism and Reproduction

The first part of this section will review the main arguments in *Schooling*, followed by criticisms of the analyses, and an examination of cultural and hegemonic reproduction theories.

Schooling in Capitalist America offers a wide ranging and detailed account of contemporary American public education practices. Bowles and Gintis argue that educational practices in America maintain and reproduce a system of structured social inequality through their close correspondence to capitalist economic relationships. The "correspondence principle" explains why schools cannot simultaneously promote full personal development and social equality (following from traditional liberal conceptions of education) while integrating students into society.

According to the "correspondence principle" the social relations of work are reflected in the social relations of school, thus providing an advance socialization of potential workers into the type of compliance expected of them in the labour market. The correspondence between education and work is specified as follows:

the social relationships of education - the relationships between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, students and students, and students and their work - replicate the hierarchical division of labour (Bowles and Gintis, 1976: 131).

The education system contributes to the totality of capitalism in several ways. First, education plays a dual role. On one hand, schools teach the technical and social skills and appropriate motivations necessary for capitalist labour force participation, thereby increasing the productive capacity of workers. On the other hand, education helps "defuse and depoliticize the potentially explosive class relations of the production process", and thus serves to perpetuate the social, economic, and political conditions through which a portion of the product of labour is expropriated in the form of profits (Bowles and Gintis, 1976: 10-11).

Second, schools perpetuate the social relationships of economic life by facilitating a smooth integration of youth into the labour force. There are several forms this role takes. For example, schools legitimate social inequality through the meritocratic manner in which they reward and promote students, allocating them to positions in the occupational hierarchy; schools foster types of personal development compatible with the relationships of dominance and subordination in the economic sphere; and schools create surpluses of skilled labour sufficiently extensive to "render effective the prime weapon of the employer in disciplining labour - the power to hire and fire" (Bowles and Gintis, 1976: 11).

Third, the manner in which schools reproduce labour is through close correspondence between the social relationships which govern personal interaction in the work place and the social relationships of the educational system: the relationships of authority and control between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, students and students, and students and their work replicate the hierarchical division of labour which dominates the work place.

Fourth, Bowles and Gintis identify several contradictory aspects in the American public education system. There are contradictions within capitalism, contradictions between education and capitalism, contradictory educational goals, and contradictions in ideology. Within capitalism there is the contradiction between labour and capital. This fundamental and antagonistic relation, Bowles and Gintis point out, has itself changed in significant ways. The historical success of capitalism in satisfying many people's consumption needs is an important base for its legitimacy. However, the internal contradiction between the "progressive, growth-oriented tendencies of capitalist accumulation and the conservative, inertial tendencies of the capitalist social relations of production" (Bowles and Gintis, 1976: 278-279) means that legitimation of capitalism is "increasingly handled by other social mechanisms" (ibid.: 279), viz., the

education system.

The contradiction between education and capitalism entails conflicting capitalist educational objectives: the "augmentation of labour power, and the reproduction of the conditions for its exploitation" (ibid.: 203). That is, the types of training required to develop productive workers may also produce radical consciousness, and attempts by working people to use education to gain a greater share of the social wealth and the pursuit of genuine critical capacities are often opposed to those of capital.

The ideologies of "equal educational opportunities" and "meritocracy" are the basis for practices that legitimize inequality. The educational system, according to Bowles and Gintis, legitimates "economic inequality" by providing an "open, objective, and ostensibly meritocratic mechanism for assigning individuals to unequal economic positions" (ibid.: 103). Through the use of "objective test scores" and "tracking based on competitive grading" the education system fosters a belief that "economic success depends essentially on the possession of technical and cognitive skills" (ibid.). Linking economic success to technical skills thus strengthens the legitimation of economic inequality.

While Bowles and Gintis argue that the ideology of "meritocracy" is "largely symbolic", they find it is etched deeply into "both popular culture and the social science methodology" (ibid.: 106). They point out that debate

surrounding "open admissions", based on the meritocracy principle, clearly illustrates the extent to which the ideology of "merit" is embedded in social consciousness. They argue that "open admissions" contradicts the legitimation of "economic inequality and the smooth staffing of unequal work roles" (ibid., 108) because it shows that "objective test scores" and educational success are not necessarily related to "merit".

An historical analysis by Bowles and Gintis clearly summarizes their main argument:

changes in the structure of education are associated historically with changes in the social organization of production. The fact that changes in the structure of production have preceded parallel changes in schooling establishes a strong prima facie case for the causal importance of economic structure as a major determinant of educational structure (1976: 224).

Bowles and Gintis, while presenting a critique of education that challenges its liberal roots, have also contributed to radical analyses of education by inspiring work that elaborates on their arguments. Canadian work in the same tradition reveals a similar relationship between schooling and capitalism.

Nock (1983: 370) argues a simple thesis: "each system of education is closely tied to the dominant mode of production". Ours is a capitalist mode of production hence a capitalist education. Nock illustrates several ways in which education is "tied" to the mode of production. There is, for instance, the correspondence between stratification

of the education system and the increased growth of classes or segments of classes that are neither commodity nor food producers. The introduction of free and compulsory formal education is traced to changes in industrial technology and to bourgeois fears of working class rebellion. The form of the curriculum is shown to be as important as its content in the preparation of pupils for the world of work (Nock, 1983: 370-371). Nock also examines a topic highly relevant to this thesis - community colleges.

Community colleges have developed as a consequence of increasing vocationalism. Canadian community colleges are a transformed version of the American system which indicates that "imitation of the centre by the periphery in the ideological sphere is a common occurrence" (Nock, 1983: 363). Nock cites a study by Pincus (1978) that reveals important insights about community colleges.

Pincus outlines two sets of goals for the colleges; "public" goals and "non-public" goals. The "public goals" are stated and designed to bring equal opportunity to all students in higher education. There are five "public" goals: (1) a comprehensive curriculum, (2) an open-door admissions policy, (3) convenient location, (4) an attempt to give students a second chance, and (5) a community orientation (Pincus, 1978: 174). These goals coincide with the public "mission" statements, cited above, for the community college system in B.C.

Of special significance to this analysis of entry-level assessment are the "non-public" or unstated goals. Community colleges act as a screening agency. Decisions are made in colleges concerning who should enter terminal programs (i.e., programs that qualify students for employment after college) and who should be allowed into transfer programs leading to university. This division along academic lines reflects the division of labour in the workforce where community colleges provide the technical or "paraprofessional" labour to assist professionals (Pincus, 1978: 175). Inherent in the academic stratification (and the corresponding labour hierarchy) are class and ethnic divisions. Community college students are more likely to be from working-class backgrounds, and among community college students Blacks and Spanish Americans tend to be over represented in terminal versus transfer programs and in remedial or "developmental programs" (Pincus, 1978: 178-183).

Community colleges also act as a place where students come to accept and "even like their fate on the lower rungs of the class ladder" (Nock, 1983: 363-364). The main mechanisms of this process are "counselling services" through which counsellors "can help students to 're-define' their educational goals" (Pincus, 1978: 176).

Community colleges are a "proletarian alternative of the university". The "presence of the community college has

taken some of the pressure off [universities to expand] by diverting working class students who might otherwise demand entrance to university" (Nock, 1983: 364). Community colleges, by providing an alternative to university, contribute to a pattern of tracking within the education system that promotes a two-tiered structure in which working-class people are under represented in universities and over represented in community colleges. Within community colleges similar structures exist between terminal and transfer programs further dividing students along class and ethnic lines.

Pincus (1978: 185) observes that community colleges are part of a "tracked educational system that provides a trained labor force in an increasingly differentiated economy". He concludes that community colleges in the U.S., contrary to "democratizing education" by providing access and equality, maintain a "rigid stratification" closely "tied to the class and ethnic division of labor" (Pincus, 1978: 187-189).

The analyses by Nock and Pincus suggest another important division in conjunction with class and ethnicity, viz., gender. Patriarchy is not an epiphenomenon of capitalism; it an inherent, embedded practice that organizes and is organized by capitalist social relations. Studies of the Canadian education system show that women, in educational institutions, are excluded from positions of

influence and control (Smith, 1975 and 1987) and within schools women are streamed into vocational courses and are under represented in higher education (Gaskell, 1987; Guppy et al., 1987).

The relation of entry-level assessment to college educational practice corresponds, I argue, to the description outlined above by Nock and Pincus. If we accept the premise that a capitalist mode of production necessarily entails a capitalist form of education and that the inherent contradictions between labour and capital, and accumulation and reproduction processes are reflected, to some extent, in the social organization of capitalist society, then the education system must reproduce and maintain capitalist social relations. The obvious and public goals of community colleges such as "access" are contradicted in practice by the "unstated" goals of selection to legitimate reproduction of inequalities and rationalize differential educational outcomes. The division of the education system into university and community college strata maintains differential class relations between elite and non-elite which further fragment class relations within the community college into "vocational" and "university transfer" tracks. As Nock observes, "class barriers are being reproduced within an ever larger and more stratified educational system" (Nock, 1983: 365). Even though I argue in favour of a "reproduction" theory there are, however, several problem

areas which must be noted. Below, I review significant criticisms of Bowles and Gintis's reproduction theory and of the "correspondence principle" articulated by Bowles and Gintis and applied in Nock's analysis.

By far the most critical attention attracted by *Schooling* has been of its theoretical aspects⁴. Hogan clearly summarizes the theoretical deficits in *Schooling*:

It is characterized by an ahistorical treatment of the functions of education, an economistic conception of social structure, an inadequate theory of reproduction and contradiction, and a seriously inaccurate account of educational politics (Hogan, 1979: 408).

A logical explanation for these deficiencies is proposed by Sarup (1978). He argues that a "dislocation" in the work of Bowles and Gintis "arises from the fact that though they have a Marxist commitment, they have a *structural-functional* view of society derived from Durkheim and Parsons⁵" (Sarup, 1978: 172-73). Consequently, the work of Bowles and Gintis is characterized by a positivist epistemology, an empiricist methodology, and a determinist ontology (Sarup, 1978: 173)⁶.

Implicit in Bowles and Gintis's analysis is a theory of the state in which the actions of the state correspond more or less directly to the requirements of capital. The "state sector" increasingly intervenes in the "corporate sector" by resolving "at least temporarily - the contradiction between accumulation and reproduction" (Bowles and Gintis, 1976: 232-233). Sarup (1982) points out that Bowles and Gintis

posit an economic theory in which the state and capitalist corporations become virtually indistinguishable;

it reduces the totality of capitalist social relations to those of the production process itself. The state apparatuses and institutions, like the educational system, are assumed to be simply functional to capital (Sarup, 1982: 51).

According to the economic view, education has no autonomy. As Shapiro (1982) recognizes, such a view results in a homeostatic conception of educational change: "[e]ducation - its theory, practice, and institutions - reacts (or corresponds) to the needs to the economic structure so as to ensure its stability and continuity" (Shapiro, 1982: 515-516). The mechanism that reproduces economic and social inequalities through education is, according to Bowles and Gintis, the "correspondence principle". This aspect of their analysis has been given much attention.

The emphasis on the close "correspondence" between education and economic structure tends to yield an account that is essentially static and usurps any notions of human activity in living in a society dominated by capitalist ideology. Education is thus seen as an unwitting pawn of capitalists in the pursuit of profit, reproducing a compliant and consenting labour force. The "correspondence principle" appears to exaggerate and overstate the relationship between education and capitalism. In subsequent reflections, Bowles and Gintis admit that the

most critical problem with the "correspondence principle" is that:

by standing in our approach as the *only* structural link between education and economy and by its character as an inherently *harmonious* link between the two, the correspondence has forced us to adopt a narrow and inadequate appreciation of the *contradictions* involved in the articulation of the educational system within the social totality (Bowles and Gintis, 1980: 53).

In advancing a transformed "correspondence principle", they argue that:

society should be treated as an ensemble of structurally articulated *sites of social practice*. By *site* we mean a cohesive area of social life characterized by a specified set of characteristic social relations or structures (Bowles and Gintis, 1980: 55).

This transformation of their theory in *Schooling*, although an improvement, still evokes the criticism that it is "weakly formulated" and that the "correspondence principle" is "misguided" with potential for a "reactionary rather than progressive implication" (Cole, 1983: 471; see also Giroux, 1980)⁷.

Further, Willis (1981: 53) notes that the "notion of 'correspondence' omits the possibility of resistance". Consequently, the analysis is unable to "comprehend the massive and currently evident 'misfits' between the economy and education" (Willis, 1981: *ibid.*). In the end, Willis charges that Bowles and Gintis's analysis does much of the "straight statistical" work for "bourgeois apologetics" by "[c]onfirming what the powerful believe" (Willis, 1981: *ibid.*).

However, despite strong criticisms the "correspondence principle" contains several important insights essential to a comprehensive understanding of education and capitalism. First, it implies that schools cannot be analyzed as institutions separate and apart from the socioeconomic context within which they are situated. Second, also implied in the principle, is a class analysis of schooling, one that shifts the "blame for educational failure from teachers and students to the structural dynamics of the dominant society" (Giroux, 1980: 226). Thus, explanations emphasizing IQ (such as Jensen, 1969) or individual differences do not hold in light of the correspondence principle. Third, the principle has provided an effective, if limited, critique of the liberal political economy of education. Finally, in its formulation, the principle itself has sparked further theoretical work and thus constitutes, as Hogan (1979: 409) reminds us, a "valuable, if flawed, starting-point for a Marxist research program into the history and political economy of education".

We will now turn to a brief review of other analyses of capitalist reproduction processes.

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Cultural Reproduction

Another form of reproduction theory is developed by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). While sharing a concern with the question of how capitalist societies reproduce themselves, Bourdieu and Passeron reject functionalist notions that attribute the effects of domination to a single, central apparatus, or fail to see how the dominated participate in their own oppression.

Instead, Bourdieu and Passeron argue that class-divided societies are mediated and reproduced through "symbolic violence". That is, class control is not merely a reflex of economic power imposing itself in the form of overt force and resistance; instead,

Every power to exert symbolic violence, i.e., every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to these power relations (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 4).

Culture thus becomes the mediating link between the ruling class interests and everyday life. Class control seeks to present the economic and political interests of the dominant classes not as arbitrary and historically contingent but as necessary and natural elements of the social order.

Education is an important part of the "pedagogic action" that imposes the particular "cultural arbitrary" of the dominating groups in society on other groups (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 5). By appearing to be an impartial and neutral "transmitter" of the benefits of a valued culture,

schools are able to promote inequality in the name of fairness and objectivity:

Thus every ES [educational system] must produce and reproduce by the means proper to the institution, the institutional conditions for misrecognition of the symbolic violence which it exerts, i.e. recognition of its legitimacy as a pedagogic institution (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 61).

Schools, then, are particularly important in both legitimating and reproducing the dominant culture. Schools, especially at the levels of higher education, embody class interests and ideologies that capitalize upon a kind of familiarity and set of skills that only specific students have received through their family backgrounds and class relations (i.e., cultural capital). Thus, pupils from lower income backgrounds, who lack the necessary cultural capital, learn that their objective chances of success are low. Consequently, they lower their aspirations in line with objective chances of success as members of a class category. Their subjectively expressed "low aspirations" therefore are no more than objective chances intuitively perceived and gradually internalized (Bourdieu, 1974: 33-35).

Two concepts are critical in understanding the processes of cultural reproduction: "habitus" and "cultural capital". The concept of "habitus" refers to a "system of schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action" which reflects the material and symbolic interests of the dominant groups or classes (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 40). "Habitus" (analogous to "genetic capital"; Bourdieu

and Passeron, 1977: 32) are those subjective dispositions which reflect class-based social grammar of taste, knowledge, and behaviour permanently inscribed in the "body schema and schemes of thought" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 42-43). Each class has its own "habitus" because, as Bourdieu (1977: 502) argues, different social classes vary in the nature of their primary socialization, thus, each class has its own characteristic habitus with individual variations. For example, students are more likely to be perceived by their teachers as less intellectually competent than their standard-English speaking middle class peers if they respond in single words - such as "yeah" or "nope" -or in short phrases rather than more complete statements (quoted in Bennett and LeCompte, 1990: 17).

The "habitus", according to Bourdieu and Passeron, represents the mediating link between structures, social practice, and reproduction. In other words, objective structures (language, schools, economies) tend to produce dispositions, which, in turn, structure social experiences that reproduce the same objective structures.

"Cultural capital" (comparable to economic capital) refers to those different sets of linguistic and cultural competencies that individuals inherit by way of the class-located boundaries of their family (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 73-76). Cultural capital includes the general cultural background, knowledge and skills passed on from one

generation to the next. Some cultural capital has a higher "exchange rate" and is therefore more valuable than others. High culture, for example, the arts, literature, and languages, characterize the middle and upper classes and is the most highly valued. Thus, a child inherits from his or her family those sets of meanings, qualities of style, modes of thinking, and types of dispositions that are accorded a certain social value and status as a result of what the dominant classes label the most valued cultural capital.

In sum, the cultural reproduction theory of Bourdieu and Passeron represents a marked improvement over that of Bowles and Gintis. The emphasis on *cultural* reproduction departs from the *economic* reproduction of Bowles and Gintis by examining how "education functions to safeguard the dominant position of certain groups"; by emphasizing the "unequal communication of the dominant culture"; and by defining the "concept of socialization as occurring through misrecognition of the arbitrary nature of norms" (Lakomski, 1984: 152). The theory provides a sophisticated account wherein schools *mediate* the processes of social reproduction.

There are, however, theoretical flaws that limit its analytical value. Embedded in the theory are "mechanistic notions of power and domination and an overly deterministic view of human agency" (Giroux, 1983a: 271). For example, Bourdieu and Passeron state that:

The agents produced by PW [pedagogic work] would not be so *totally the prisoners* of the limitations which the cultural arbitrary *imposes* on their thought and practice, were it not that, contained within these limits by self-discipline and self-censorship (the more unconscious to the extent that their principles have been internalized), they live out their thought and practice in the illusion of freedom and universality [emphasis added] (1977: 40).

Terms, such as "prisoner" and "imposes" imply a power relation that is one of total domination of one class over the others. That domination, it appears, is one-way - from the top down. The concept "habitus" also appears to be based on one-sided psychological notions of domination and social control. In addition, the processes for which the concept "habitus" purports to account are not clearly delineated but are left as "body schema and the schemes of thought" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 42-43).

In the theory, human agency - the capacity to make choices and decisions for action - is severely limited (or eclipsed) by the overpowering domination of one class. The conditions for dissent, resistance, and struggles between classes are reduced to homogeneous groups who differ only to the extent to which they hold or react to power. Thus, the working-classes fail to develop a social consciousness, because the internalized habitus leads them to "live out their thought and practice in the illusion of freedom and universality" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 40).

A lack of a consistent theory of ideology is another problem. In Bourdieu and Passeron's theorizing of ideology

human agency is excluded. Their concept of "habitus" makes "unproblematic" the "transmission of middle-class culture to middle-class children, a conception in which working-class children are, by definition, culture-less" (Lakomski, 1984: 153). Human agency, and the ways in which people create, resist, and accommodate themselves to dominant ideologies, and practices gives way in Bourdieu and Passeron's analysis to the "imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 5). Schools reproduce the dominant ideologies because:

. . . the School is better able than ever, at all events in the only way conceivable in a society wedded to democratic ideologies, to contribute to the reproduction of the established order, since it succeeds better than ever in concealing the function it performs (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 167).

Bourdieu and Passeron's theory of symbolic violence artificially creates boundaries around people, leaving them incapable of making changes or even creating the conditions of their daily lives. It would appear that the progressive insights of Bourdieu and Passeron's cultural reproduction theory (i.e., that schools mediate the processes of social reproduction) are obstructed by deterministic and mechanistic tendencies. Consequently, their theory seems to create more problems than solutions. However, elements of their analysis do reveal practices important to assessment. For example, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977: 153) observe that the French educational system assigns examinations an important role because of the "hidden services" examinations

render to certain classes by concealing "social selection under the guise of technical selection and legitimating the reproduction of the social hierarchies by transmuting them into academic hierarchies". This suggests that entry-level assessment may provide similar "services" to the college by rendering invisible, through the "technical" test instrument, a class-based selection process. In sum, Giroux (1983a: 274) comments that "most reproduction theories informed by Bourdieu's notion of domination ultimately fail to provide the comprehensive theoretical elements needed for a radical pedagogy".

Hegemonic Reproduction

Another version of reproduction theory, emerging from the influential work of Gramsci (1971), emphasizes as one feature the role of governmental intervention in the education system⁸. Government, although part of the state, is not identical to the state. Such an identification represents, according to Gramsci (1971: 262), an "economic-corporate form" that distorts the actual nature of the relationship. Government's role in education is itself a constituent in the unity of "civil society" and "political society". Gramsci distinguishes the two as follows:

What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the State'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command

exercised through the State and 'juridical' government. (Gramsci, 1971: 12).

Gramsci speaks of civil society "as the political and cultural hegemony of a social group on the whole of society, as ethical content of the State" (quoted in Bobbio, 1979: 31). Civil society is thus a mediating site between the state and capital.

The supremacy of a social group is manifested in two ways, as "domination" and "hegemony" (Boggs, 1976: 38). In the first of these, the ruling class exercises its control by "domination" and/or through its "intellectual and moral leadership" (Gramsci, 1971: 57). A social group may dominate subordinate groups through the use of direct physical coercion to "liquidate, or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force" and/or it may use its leadership to win "kindred and allied groups" (ibid.). That is, alliances are formed among dominant classes as a "result of the power and ability of one class to articulate the interest of other social groups to its own" (Giroux, 1983a: 274).

However, Gramsci argues that no social group can dominate only through the use of force; even the most authoritarian regimes must have some form of consent. "Hegemony" (consent, ideological control) emphasizes the role of ideology as a active force used by dominant classes to "shape and incorporate the commonsense views, needs, and interests of subordinate groups" (Giroux, 1983a: 274). In this form, the political control which permeates all

structures of society, is captured in Gramsci's concept of "integral state" which unifies "coercion" and "hegemony" and implies the "incorporation of the apparatuses of hegemony, of civil society, to the state" (Mouffe, 1979: 182). It also indicates the primacy of the ideological over the economic, that ideological domination rather than direct political coercion is the primary instrument of bourgeois rule.

In the processes of ideological domination Gramscians attribute significance to the material and institutional nature of ideological practice. The material and institutional structures are important sites for elaborating and spreading ideology through different "hegemonic apparatuses": schools, churches, the entire media and even architecture (Mouffe, 1979: 187). This ensemble of apparatuses is termed the "ideological structure" of a dominant class by Gramsci, and the level of the superstructure where ideology is produced and diffused is termed "civil society".

The creation of "counter-hegemonic" ideology to realize "moral and intellectual reform" is part of the practice of radical intellectuals. The task for radical intellectuals in counter-hegemonic struggle for hegemony is to take the initiative by raising new questions and introducing new modes of thinking about reality, attacking the accepted wisdom of established intellectual authorities, and

providing theoretical guidance to emerging mass struggles (Boggs, 1976: 77).

In the educational system, according to hegemony theorists⁹, the state plays key roles in the production and dissemination of knowledge that determines the curriculum as well as the ways in which the curriculum is presented in the schools. The state requires that school boards comply with a standard curriculum and teachers are required to teach the skills and concepts contained in the curriculum. Schools, therefore, reflect the ideology underlying state agencies regulating the school process. Giroux (1983b: 197) also argues that hegemony is reflected in schools not only in the formal curriculum, but also in routines and social relationships with the schools and in the way knowledge is structured.

The state plays an active role in education in two interrelated domains: the production of knowledge and regulation. In the production of knowledge the state exercises control by overseeing and funding research and development. This gives the state control over the type of research it funds and the type of knowledge produced from the research. For example, Awender and Nease (1987: 546) point out that "grants [for research] can be withheld unless the [education] department's regulations are fulfilled". Apple (1982: 54) also argues that the "state will take on the large initial cost of basic research and development.

It then 'transfers' the fruits of it back to the 'private sector' once it becomes profitable". Thus, knowledge produced under conditions controlled by the state conforms, in significant ways, to modes of thinking (dominant in the state) that further the economic interests of the dominant classes.

Furthermore, the knowledge-power relationship also manifests itself through the hierarchical structure of the schools where there are vocational and academic streams. In this relationship the state "appropriates, trains, and legitimates intellectuals who serve as experts in the production and conception of school knowledge, and who ultimately function to separate knowledge from both manual work and popular consumption" (Giroux, 1983b: 280).

The state actively regulates all facets of the educational system from certification of teachers, to developing formal curriculum, to testing requirements. The most direct intervention by the state is constituted in federal and provincial laws. These laws organize the educational system as part of the capitalist relations of production. As a part of the state and capital relation, the economic and social interests of capital underlie state policies and laws. The connection between education and the level of societal development is made by Gramsci:

School is the instrument through which intellectuals of various levels are elaborated. The complexity of the intellectual function in different states can be measured objectively by the number and gradation of

specialised schools: the more extensive the 'area' covered by education and the more numerous the 'vertical' 'levels' of schooling, the more complex is the cultural world, the civilisation, of a particular state (Gramsci, 1971: 10-11).

Hegemony theories of reproduction add insights about the political connections and nature of education, viz., how the social and cultural reproduction processes function in the political sphere. They direct attention to the autonomy of the state (e.g., provincial and federal governments) in exerting control on daily activities in schools, to the ideological reproduction of dominant class interests, and to how schools mediate the logic of domination.

The progressive insights of Gramsci speak to the heart of entry-level assessment practices. To anticipate the following analysis, it will be shown that an important aspect of the "work" of assessment entails rationalizing placement decisions to examinees. This activity secures the "consent" of individuals through various bureaucratic procedures. Securing examinees' consent contributes significantly to the overall legitimation of the college's assessment practices by mystifying a selection process. In addition, assessment workers are shown to be active in creating and maintaining an ideological bond between examinees and the college.

Limitations in hegemonic reproduction theories, however, have been noted. First, their primary focus on macro and structural processes tends to ignore human agency

in the contradictions and struggles encountered in everyday life and in concrete school relations. Second, culture is subsumed under notions of domination rather than viewed as a relatively autonomous sphere with its own contradictions. In this view culture is often "simply the object of resistance rather than its source" (Giroux, 1983a: 282).

Reproduction and Entry-level Assessment

According to theories of reproduction, education contributes to the totality of contemporary capitalism in several ways. Schools reproduce capitalist economic and social relations by providing different classes and social groups with the knowledge and skills they need to occupy their respective place in a workplace hierarchically stratified by race/ethnicity, gender, and class. Schools are seen as culturally reproductive, functioning in part to distribute and legitimate forms of knowledge, values, language, modes of style that constitute the dominant culture and its interests. Schools are viewed as part of a state apparatus that produces and legitimates the economic and ideological imperatives that underlie the state's political power.

Within education, assessment practices contribute to reproducing capitalist relations by channelling people into various curriculum tracks. "Objective educational testing" supports educational stratification through its appearance as an "unbiased means of measuring the product of schooling

and classifying students" (Bowles and Gintis, 1976: 195). Assessment tests may be also viewed as expressions of "linguistic capital" used by the dominant classes to control access to higher education:

Nothing would better serve this function of *sociodicy* [justification of society] than formally irreproachable tests which could claim to measure, at a given point in time, the subjects' aptitude to occupy vocational posts . . . (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 163).

Consistent with hegemony theories, the underlying rationale for assessment may be seen as encapsulating the particular set of social, political, and economic conditions prevalent in capitalist society. The prevailing social order is legitimized by a particular set of political, social, and economic conditions within which people understand the existing order as natural (Broadfoot, 1979: 99).

While reproduction theories furnish insights regarding assessment, education, and capitalism they also restrict analyses through common limitations. They tend to overemphasize the notion of domination either structurally (economic) or culturally. Human agency is either ignored or accorded an unproblematic role so that questions of resistance, opposition, challenges, and change are *not* seen as fruitful avenues for analysis. Their reliance on macro-sociological models fails to grasp how the "lived" experiences of students, teachers, and others come together within specific historical and social contexts in order to make and reproduce the conditions of their existence.

There is current research that challenges and attempts to overcome the limitations of reproduction theories by emphasizing human agency and "lived experience" as the basis for analyzing the relationship between education and capitalism.

Education, Capitalism and Resistance

Theories of resistance reject the reproductionist emphasis on domination and structure, and emphasize conflict, struggle, resistance, and human agency. Key among these theories is the work of Paul Willis (1977).

Learning to Labour is an ethnography and analysis of English working class male school culture. At the outset Willis poses the research problem as follows: "The difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves" (Willis, 1977: 1). His analysis goes on to describe the processes through which working class kids "choose" manual labouring jobs.

In Part I, Willis describes his research methodology. The study features one main study group and five comparative case studies also conducted over the same time period. The main study group consists of twelve non-academic working class "lads" selected on the basis of "friendship links and membership of some kind of oppositional culture in a working class school" (1977: 4). The five comparative case studies focus on a group of conformist lads (known as "ear'oles"), a group of working-class non-conformist lads in a local

grammar school, a similar group in a comprehensive, and a mixed class male non-conformist group in a high status grammar school (1977: 4-5).

In Part II, the central theme guiding Willis's analysis is the search for the conditions that allow "an unfree condition to be entered into freely" (1977: 120). Specifically, Willis is concerned with why manual labouring jobs, seemingly the least rewarded and most meaningless, are positively anticipated and taken on by young working class males. The key to understanding this process, according to Willis, is the culture.

Culture plays a critical role not only for the "lads" but in Willis's analysis as well because it is here that the bases for individual's actions and interpretations of the world are produced. The cultural, Willis states, is a

kind of creativity . . . The cultural does not simply, mechanically mark, or in some sense 'live out' wider social contradictions. It works upon them with its own resources (1977: 124).

In this process, the elements of culture take form and become the basis for the production of meaning and action. The main elements of the lads' oppositional school culture are described in the ethnography: opposition to authority, loyalty to the informal group, struggles over space, "having a laff", racism, and sexism. Each of these elements plays a role in creating the lads' particular culture and each is an expression of their resistance to institutional and class domination. Willis argues that these elements provide the

context out of which the lads "creatively develop, transform and finally reproduce aspects of the larger culture in such a way as to finally direct them to certain kinds of work" (1977: 2).

The lads' school culture plays an important role in conditioning their expectations of manual work. While the lads recognize that work or the job itself is meaningless and routine, their culture provides them with other resources for attaching meaning and a positive valuation to manual labour. Willis argues that the subjective importance of intrinsic features of work is minimized and denied at the same time as its cultural or symbolic characteristics are developed and made meaningful by the group. Willis claims that the working class school culture of the lads represents the "subjective inhabitation of a certain definition of manual labour power" (1977: 120). At the root of this particular definition of labour power are working class cultural beliefs about masculinity in combination with resistance towards the school and the mental labour associated with it.

The sexual division of labour underlies the lads' belief in masculinity. According to Willis, the lads' assumptions about women reflect a rather traditional set of attitudes: "whilst women must be sexually attractive, they cannot be sexually experienced" (1977: 43). Women are viewed, by the lads, either as purely sexual creatures with

no identity, or as revered and faithful domestic companions.

The lads' expectations of their own future is modelled on their own family experiences. The dominant female figure in their lives is their mother and her most important function is to serve the men in the house. The lads' view of the sexual division of labour is thus reinforced both in their personal lives and through the patriarchal ideologies of the larger society.

Mental and manual differences encountered at school and recognized in the world of work provide another set of divisions in the lads' experience. The mental/manual division of labour that is represented by the sexual division of labour converges through the processes of social reproduction. Willis states:

It is often overlooked that where two sets of division are lived out in the same concrete space they cannot remain separate. The pressure of consciousness and culture which work upon their own materials in their own location and seek a kind of unity will not live separately in two systems of ideas which both occur in the compression of their own life space (1977: 148-149).

The primary mechanism through which this convergence occurs is the lads' sex-typing of certain kinds of activities. The major reason mental work is degraded is because it is passive and restricted, the very characteristics attributed to women. Masculinity and manual labour thus become indistinguishable:

The brutality of the working situation is partially re-interpreted into a heroic exercise of manly confrontation with the task. Difficult, uncomfortable

or dangerous conditions are seen, not for themselves, but for their appropriateness to masculine readiness and hardness. They are understood more through the toughness required to survive them, than in the nature of the imposition which asks them to be faced in the first place (Willis, 1977: 150).

The relationship between manual labour and masculinity thus is the mechanism through which the reproduction of working class, manual labour can be understood, and it represents Willis's answer to the question "how do working class kids get working class jobs?".

Willis posits a logic to cultural production that can be understood through its transformations. As Willis demonstrates, however, the significance of cultural production is its role in reproducing unfreedom. To make sense of this seeming paradox, he introduces the concepts of "penetration" and "limitations". According to Willis:

Penetration is meant to designate impulses within a cultural form towards the penetration of the conditions of existence of its members and their position within the social whole but in a way which is not centered, essentialist, or individualist. Limitation is meant to designate those blocks, diversions, and ideological effects which confuse and impede the full development of these impulses (1977: 119).

The form of these two tendencies is represented by the concept "partial penetration". These cultural resolutions and expressions are used to explain how the lads' opposition gets channelled into the ultimate reproduction of their labour power and of class society itself. Willis asserts that "cultural forms provide the material towards, and the immediate context of, construction of subjectivities and the

confirmation of identities" (1977: 173). What he labels as the "subjective inhabitation of labour power" thus becomes the fundamental link between the cultural production and the reproduction of class domination (1977: 120).

Willis's analysis is useful because it illustrates the necessity of dealing with real people and their situations which leads to observations and conclusions that are not anticipated by theories uninformed by first-hand empirical accounts. However, Willis's analysis is not without its problems.

There is a strong tendency in his analysis to underplay the role of the state in influencing schools and in shaping hegemonic practices that do not show up in the most immediate experiences of people. The role of more objective and external socio-political or economic factors as sources of contradictions tends to be discounted. The concept of resistance and the form it takes is sometimes over-romanticized in Willis's account. And, as Giroux (1981a: 14) notes, there is a "misplaced pessimism that stands between the critical Marxist orientation of these [Willis's] accounts and their focus on the existential dimensions of working class life".

The issue of abstract theorizing appears to be another problem. Willis sketches an outline for a "theory of cultural forms and social reproduction" based on his detailed analysis of one group (twelve) of "non-conforming

lads". There is some question as to whether Willis's analysis is applicable to the working class in general. Willis's attempt to develop a general theory of working-class consciousness using comparisons with such a small group suggests that not only may its applicability be limited to a small sector of working class males, but Willis's analysis also may be relevant only to working class males in a particular historical context.

In his discussion of cultural limitation, Willis notes the important role of ideology in shaping class cultural processes. The materials and resources of cultural production are drawn in part from the dominant ideologies. Capitalist ideologies and the institutions which reproduce them are not static, however. Rather, they are variously adapted and transformed in response to changing political, economic, and historical conditions. Willis's recognition that ideology influences cultural forms and the lads' appropriation of labour power suggests that his analysis is historically specific to the particular situation of the English working class during the early 1970's. Giroux (1983a: 285) finds a tendency in Willis's account to inadequately "conceptualize the historical development of the conditions that promote and reinforce contradictory modes of resistance and struggle. What is missing are analyses of those historically and culturally mediated factors that produce a range of oppositional behaviors, some

of which constitute resistance and some of which do not".

In summary, Willis's theory of resistance emphasize the tensions and conflicts that mediate relationships among home, school, and the workplace. These tensions and conflicts are seen as part of capitalist social relations and as part of a process of self-formation within the working-class. Both capitalist social relations and self-formation are continually produced culturally. Cultural production is the basis for human agency whereby people actively create

discourses, meanings, materials, practices and group processes to explore, understand, and creatively occupy particular positions in sets of general material possibilities. For oppressed groups, this is likely to include oppositional forms and cultural penetrations at particular concrete sites or regions (Willis, 1981: 59).

Willis's theory provides useful insights into the relations between culture and assessment. His notion of cultural "penetration", for example, suggests an account of resistance by examinees to writing assessment tests. It may be hypothesized that the "specific combination of cultural 'insight' and partiality which gives the mediated strength of personal validation and identity to individual behaviour" (Willis, 1977: 119-120) is the basis for some examinees' antagonism to testing. That is, for some examinees their cultural experiences (in part a reproduction of capitalist social relations and in part a creative process of "self-formation") which inform or provide the rational for

writing, may conflict, with "official" assumptions about motivations. Thus, the informal culture and cultural penetrations may assist some examinees to "choose" certain types of courses (such as "vocational" over "academic" or vice versa). The creative influence of culture would appear to account for some examinees' apparently "irrational" behaviour, such as abandoning the test, or refusing remedial advice offered within the "rational" process of assessment.

Willis also provides a basis for understanding worker resistance or challenges to the dominant ideologies within the college. People are thus not merely passive receptors or internalizers of institutional practices but actively participate in and challenge the creation of institutional practices.

Willis's work has inspired a host of research aimed at synthesizing notions of production, reproduction, and resistance in capitalist education systems (see Apple, 1979, 1981, 1982; Giroux, 1981b, 1983b; Sharp, 1980; and Lynch, 1989).

Reproduction, Resistance and Entry-level Assessment

In light of the preceding examination of reproduction and resistance theories an outline is presented that conceptualizes the practice of entry-level assessment within education in modern capitalism.

The basic guiding premise emerging from our analysis thus far is that a capitalist mode of production creates the

necessary conditions for its existence, namely capitalist social relations. As a constituent of capitalist relations the education system reflects the contradictions inherent in capitalism and therefore reproduces and maintains capitalist relations.

Supporting evidence is offered by Bowles and Gintis in their "correspondence principle" such that educational structure and practices closely correspond to the economic structure of capitalism. The close "correspondence" posited by Bowles and Gintis, however, was found to be too narrowly defined: it resulted in a functionally harmonious and deterministic relationship between education and capitalism. The insights of Bourdieu and Passeron expand reproduction by calling attention to the critical importance of culture as a *mediating* link between education and capitalism. However, I argued that, while elements of their theory do provide valuable insights, mechanistic notions of power and an overly deterministic view of human agency tend to limit the theory's application. Gramsci's theory of "civil society" and "ideological hegemony" also provides valuable insights and suggests fruitful avenues for inquiry. The notion of "hegemony" is important to this thesis given the significance of securing examinees' consent. In asserting the primacy of consent over force, however, one may neglect those aspects of people's capacity to challenge the consent. Willis offers insights into people's resistance to the

hegemonic practices of the dominant class. Recognition of the role of culture in supporting oppositional behaviours has the potential for interesting conceptions.

It is, I think, possible to offer a synthesis of the theories examined above, with regard specifically to the contribution entry-level assessment makes to the totality of contemporary capitalism.

Within the material and social conditions created by the capitalist mode of production, education reproduces those relations. In education, entry-level assessment is a specific practice within particular historical conditions that deals with the contradiction between the principle of open access and its practice. That is, there is a dominant ideology that promotes education as a means for individual development and enlightenment which then translates into societal advancement. It follows that the more people develop their skills, abilities and potentials (through education), the more advanced and "civilized" the society. Thus, the notion of "open admission" has wide appeal. However, given the contradictions between accumulation and reproduction in capitalism, educational opportunities are limited.

Entry-level assessment is one of a set of practices within which decisions are made regarding who (or which groups) is allowed (or denied) access to limited educational resources. Using various technical tools (such as

standardized tests) assessment workers legitimate the negative placement decisions which have to be made in light of scarce resources. The work of entry-level assessment does not, however, entail just legitimation. It does the "classing" work (i.e., differentiating between "successful" and "unsuccessful" examinees) and rationalizes those types of decisions.

Entry-level assessment is not practiced in a vacuum. It is part of larger social structures and processes. Since the focus in this thesis is on entry-level assessment practices in a British Columbia community college there are obvious links with the organizational structure of the college. The college provides the conditions that enable entry-level assessment to be practiced. Within the college structure, work relations organize the activities of the participants in assessment practice. While the college provides the overall structure for assessment practices, a necessary component is the human agency that reproduces, in daily activities with examinees and with other educational workers, relations that legitimate and rationalize the college's educational activities. These are the conditions in which hegemony is practiced and resistance or challenges occur. Entry-level assessment is thus a part of the college's overall educational practices.

The college, in turn, is part of the "college system" in B.C. which is regulated by various agencies of the

provincial government. In its turn, the provincial government is a constituent in the social organization of capitalism (in Gramscian terms the "integral state"). Thus, entry-level assessment is a constituent in a complex of institutions and institutional practices that are organized by and for the capitalist mode of production.

The next step in this thesis is to elaborate the conception of entry-level assessment described above by a concrete examination of entry-level practices and the relations involved in them. One promising research strategy that appears to synthesize the necessary components of production, reproduction, and human agency has been developed by Smith (1987). The strategy, which she calls "institutional ethnography", provides a useful method for a critical analysis of the practice of assessment by explicating the specific relations of the "everyday" to the "ruling apparatus". It is the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1. For example, see Barton et al., 1980 (especially pages 1-4) and Shapiro, 1990.
2. This is subsequently referred to as *Schooling*.
3. This is subsequently referred to as *Learning*.
4. For reviews and criticisms of technical/statistical issues see, for example, Bielby et al., 1977; Heyns, 1978; and Sarup, 1978.
5. For example, see Durkheim, 1956; Parsons 1968; and Turner, 1982.
6. Sarup's criticisms have been critiqued by Price (1986). Price rejects Sarup's assertions of a "deterministic ontology" and "over-determination" in Bowles and Gintis's analysis. For his part, Price asserts that the finding that discrimination (or inequality) plays a part in reproducing the class system only "affects stratification within the working class" not "between the working classes and any bourgeoisie" (Price, 1986: 192).
7. A comment on the theoretical development of Bowles is made by Shor (1986). Shor notes a shift in Bowles's work from 1976 to 1983 that shows Bowles's "declining interest in educational reform per se" corresponding to the "new conditions of the culture war" - the restoration of conservative agendas. Consequently, as Shor observes, Bowles and his co-researchers "wisely found the cracks in the walls of authority and situated themselves in the open space for opposition" (Shor, 1986: 175).
8. Although Gramsci is classified here under the rubric of reproduction theories it may be argued that aspects in Gramsci's analysis promote active resistance. Gramsci's ideas do not fall neatly into reproduction or resistance categories but contain elements of both.
9. For example see Miliband, 1969 and Therborn, 1978.

CHAPTER TWO

INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

In Chapter One, I argued that entry-level assessment is part of the complex of institutions that organize, and are organized by, capitalist social relations. Dorothy Smith (1987) outlines a research strategy that examines social relations in terms of their material practices. In the first section of this chapter the basic components of "institutional ethnography" are described. The next section outlines a design, informed by Smith's research strategy, for analyzing the work of assessment in a community college. This design will frame the subsequent case study which forms the substance of this thesis.

"Institutional ethnography"¹ is a synthesis of several sources informed by the insights of Mead, Marx, Garfinkel, and Merleau-Ponty (Smith, 1987: 8). Synthesizing the insights of such thinkers creates fertile ground for Smith's unique contributions.

The basic premises of institutional ethnography are fourfold: (1) as a consequence of the development of contemporary capitalism a particular form of relations has emerged that organize and regulate society; (2) organization and regulation are vested in *relations of ruling*, not individuals in a "ruling class"; (3) the "relations of ruling" comprise the complex of intersecting institutions organized around different functions e.g., education,

health, and law forming the "ruling apparatus"; (4) the "relations of ruling" are objective and independent of individuals (i.e., independent of individual choice or will). From these premises certain consequences logically follow.

The dominance of the "ruling apparatus" is continually created and reproduced through practices aimed at securing consensus. The hegemonic struggle for control is vested in "documents" and "texts" in discourses. Discourses organize and structure people's activities through the ongoing practice of creating the material forms of text, such as journals, books, classrooms, conferences, and the media. Discourses, although created and manufactured by individuals, are a constituent of social relations, not individuals. This emphasizes the *creative activity* of people in their *relations* with others. Discourses, mediated by texts, are "embedded in and organiz[e] relations among subjects active in the discourse" (Smith, 1987: 214).

Elaborating her ideas on discourse in subsequent work, Smith observes that the

primary mode of action in the superstructures of business, government, the professions, and the scientific, professional, literary, and artistic discourses is utterance - verbal and, more importantly textual (Smith, 1990: 61-62).

Thus not only does discourse, according to Smith, organize relations among individuals; it also coordinates the activities, decisions, policies, and plans of actual people;

it enables the "ruling apparatus" to accomplish control.

The practice of manufacturing discourse represents an "objectification" of "local actualities" in "standardized and general forms of knowledge that enter them into the relations of ruling" (Smith, 1987: 3). The "relations of ruling", in part through discourse, transform the active, local, particular, individual and personal activities and experiences of subjects into forms that are standardized, objectified, and impersonal modes of consciousness consistent with the "organizational logics and exigencies" of a complex of relations forming the ruling apparatus (Smith, 1987: 3). This means that the ongoing practices of transforming the particular and concrete into general and abstract forms require some degree of consent from participants. It also means that the "extralocal" mode of ruling is not imposed mechanically or totally on individuals; instead in the course of their daily work people create and structure ideologies that constitute the bases for common perspectives.

The focus on "work" is an important component in institutional ethnography. Smith (1987: 165) defines work as "what people do that requires some effort, that they mean to do, and that involves some competence". Thus described, work is not circumscribed by occupational boundaries (i.e., paid employment), or traditional conceptions. In its expanded form a huge range of human activities may be

legitimately described and analyzed as work including children's play, hobbies and leisure time activities, housework, and other activities such as "driving to one's place of employment, eating lunch in the cafeteria or making and eating sandwiches, purchasing and maintaining clothes worn on the job and so on" (Smith, 1987: 165). This expanded conception of "work" thus takes in processes that

both produce and are ordered by the social relations of the institutional processes, and [the] actualities that are observable, that people can describe, and that in their concerting accomplish its orderly processes as ordered (Smith, 1987: 166).

It is within the work processes that the texts and discourse expressing the dominant ideologies are produced.

Ideology, according to Smith, describes a "set of positions in the structures that 'rule' (manage, administrate, organize, and otherwise control)" (Smith, 1987: 56). Thus conceived, ideology is a critical component in creating dominant capitalist relations that organize activities. Ideologies are constructed as a part of people's work processes so that a

a ruling class is the basis of an active process of organization, producing ideologies that serve to organize the class itself and its work of ruling, as well as to order and legitimate its domination. Ideologies take for granted the conditions of ruling-class experience (Smith, 1987: 56-57).

Implicit in Smith's conception of ideology is the active construction of ideology as a conscious activity. This suggests that ideology is not merely "illusion" or "misrecognition" as argued by Bourdieu and Passeron. It is

embedded in people's work activities. In order to accomplish their work tasks, people create texts and discourses expressing in their content the "common perspectives" associated with their work positions. Individually, these texts and discourses *appear* independently constituted, but taken together they express the "taken for granted" conditions and experiences of the "relations of ruling". What may be naively seen as an individually rational and conscious activity in the production of work-oriented texts may more properly be seen as part of the "relations of ruling"; a social organization that tends to mystify the actual connections to capitalist relations. In this way Smith's conception is of ideology as being embedded in practical, daily activities that are dialectically transformed into "extralocal, impersonal, universalized forms of action" (Smith, 1987: 5).

Smith's conceptualization of ideology also identifies its dual character. Ideas develop from material activity (i.e., they are "directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men", Marx and Engels, 1976: 42) and thus reflect social relations, yet ideas invert the social relations; they mystify and distort those social relations. Ideological practices are interrelated with people's activities as organized by capitalist productive and social relations.

Institutional ethnography attempts to surmount the abstracting tendencies of capitalist "relations of ruling" by maintaining the connections between people and their activities. The strategy stresses the "actualities of social organization and relations" by taking as a starting-point "an actual situation and [exploring] the actual relations that organize it" (Smith, 1987: 147-148).

In Smith's formulation, a particular "case", or experience, is used as an entry-point; the "locus of an experiencing subject or subjects, into a larger social and economic process" (1987: 157). People's experiences in the "everyday world" are the basis for institutional ethnographic research into the problems generated or emerging from daily practice.

This thesis explicates the social organization of the experience. The goal of this research is to build an "explicative account" making the connections explicit, so that people can understand how ruling is accomplished through daily life and ordinary work practices. Smith's research strategy, in this regard, is similar to C. Wright Mills's (1959) argument for transforming "personal troubles of milieu" into "public issues of social structure" (Mills, 1959: 8).

The methods appropriate to this research strategy include the traditional ethnographic technique of direct observation as well as "interviewing, recollection of work

experience, use of archives, [and] textual analysis" (Smith, 1987: 160). Institutional ethnography begins with people's experiences in the "everyday world" as competent practitioners of their daily activities. Using various methods it elaborates and explicates those experiences in relation to larger social processes. The strategy "seeks to locate the dynamics of a local setting in the complex of institutional relations organizing the local dynamics" (Ng, 1988: 19). Thus, institutional ethnography provides a "procedure for analyzing local work practices - the locus of the experience of the subject-as articulated to and determined by the generalized and generalizing relations of economy and ruling apparatus" (Smith, 1987: 167).

There are elements evident in institutional ethnography that appear to be consistent with Marx's method. There are notions of "levels", "concrete activity", reciprocal relations in a dialectical unity, and "structure". Thus, within the conditions created by capitalist production people's activities are necessarily conditioned by the particular form of "ruling relations". Beginning with the most immediately given level, i.e., "everyday world", the relations that organize activities and experiences are examined at levels that move the analysis to progressively more general and abstract relations. It is important to note that moving from the particular to the general does not necessarily denote an "abstracted" analysis. Institutional

ethnography keeps people's activities embedded within their material conditions and explicates the ways those activities are progressively abstracted and generalized by the practices of the "ruling apparatus".

Institutional ethnography, I think, may be viewed as a form of "counter-hegemonic" discursive practice. Overall, Smith's immediate concern is to create a research strategy that contributes an alternative account of current conditions in capitalist organization; conditions that exclude women as knowing, active subjects and that marginalize women's experiences. Smith argues cogently, passionately, and I think correctly, that women are "outside the frame" playing at best, a "subordinate role, being accorded the manual and nonspecific tasks that are essential to its [i.e., ruling apparatus's] functioning" (Smith, 1987: 53). Implicit in Smith's analysis is the reciprocal relation that not only women but many men as well are isolated and marginalized by the dominant "relations of ruling". A significant difference is that women, as a consequence of their experiences in capitalist relations, have begun to develop "counter-hegemonic" ideologies and practices which render the "gender subtext" visible. The male subtext, however, remains "concealed beneath its apparently impersonal forms" but is nevertheless integral to the "fundamentally patriarchal character of ruling" (Smith, 1987: 4).

Smith does not deal specifically with the relationship between education and capitalism. However, she does describe a research project focusing on the social organization of the school and specifically the work mothers do in relation to their children's schooling. Using excerpts from interviews, Smith reveals the processes through which the school evaluates children's school work. The project Smith describes provides an example of institutional ethnography that is highly relevant to this thesis.

There are practices of evaluation of children's school work that document the child's status relative to the class, to the school, and in some cases "relative to an anonymous population defining standards for a grade level" (Smith, 1987: 196). Evaluation is given concrete status early on when teachers award stickers (happy faces, kisses) for work completed. This evaluation, Smith notes, is the

child's apprenticeship to a documentation of the value of her work relative to that of others in the class and in the school. The school classroom as a work setting is organized around the production by the child of work enabling the teacher to evaluate her progress and status in the overall course of work established for the class in a given year (Smith, 1987: 196).

An important feature in organizing classroom work is the curriculum.

The curriculum sets definite objectives for each grade level. Set by the province and specified by local school boards, the curriculum must be "given practical

determination in the context of the actual group of children" (Smith, 1987: 197). The teacher's "professionally developed" skills translate the bare bones of the curriculum into classroom practices. "In setting the goals and carrying them out the teacher works in the context of the particular set of children she finds, with given and limited resources of materials and time" (Smith, 1987: 196).

Smith's analysis, thus far, addresses issues of education and capitalism which other sociologists address as reproduction and resistance theories: the structure (e.g., provincial curriculum) seems to determine the educational objectives, yet there is also the possibility of human agency through the actions of the teacher in translating the curriculum into practice.

Smith goes on to state that the teacher's ongoing practices of evaluation and documentation work

into the ongoing feedback enabling the teacher to see where she [child] is in relationship to the curriculum objectives and how she [teacher] has mapped them out over the year, and into the documentation of the individual child's 'performance' in the school as an accumulation of test scores or graded work books (Smith, 1987: 199).

Through such evaluation the child's activities become accountable. Consequently, these practices insert the child into a

generalized system of documenting her performance as an *individual*. The individual performance of the child is an organizational product of schooling. The child is inducted in the primary grades into the impersonal documented practices of evaluation that will organize the course she follows in school and finally into the

credentialed world subtended by the documentary practices of the school (Smith, 1987: 199).

Thus, the documentary practice of the school locates a key relation in the "power of the school over child and parents". The school's documentary practice also shapes the "child's future within the school system and eventually in the labor market" (Smith, 1987: 199-200).

Smith comments further on education as an ensemble of practices:

An educational system is in the business of producing differentiation; it produces inequalities of race, class, and gender in the normal (though not the official) course of doing its business (Smith, 1987: 219).

In this analysis, Smith reveals important mechanisms, relevant to this thesis, through which a curriculum is given its concrete and practical form. One mechanism is the documentary practices of the teacher which inserts the child into the impersonal relations and differentiating practices of the school. Another mechanism is the teacher's actions, using her "professionally developed" skills, to concretize the curriculum; i.e., to "translate the bare bones of the curriculum into classroom practices" (Smith, 1987: 197).

Smith's analysis does not depend on conceptions of one-way domination at the expense of human agency nor does it mechanically reduce participants to automatons, or elevate them to rebels without a cause. It does provide valuable insights into an everyday activity in which the "production process in terms of levels of documented performance of

children ties the school as a whole into the secondary schools it routinely 'feeds'" (Smith, 1987: 202). This type of analysis potentially could be extended across the educational system.

The next section outlines a design for investigating the work of assessment in a community college.

A Design for Analyzing Assessment Work

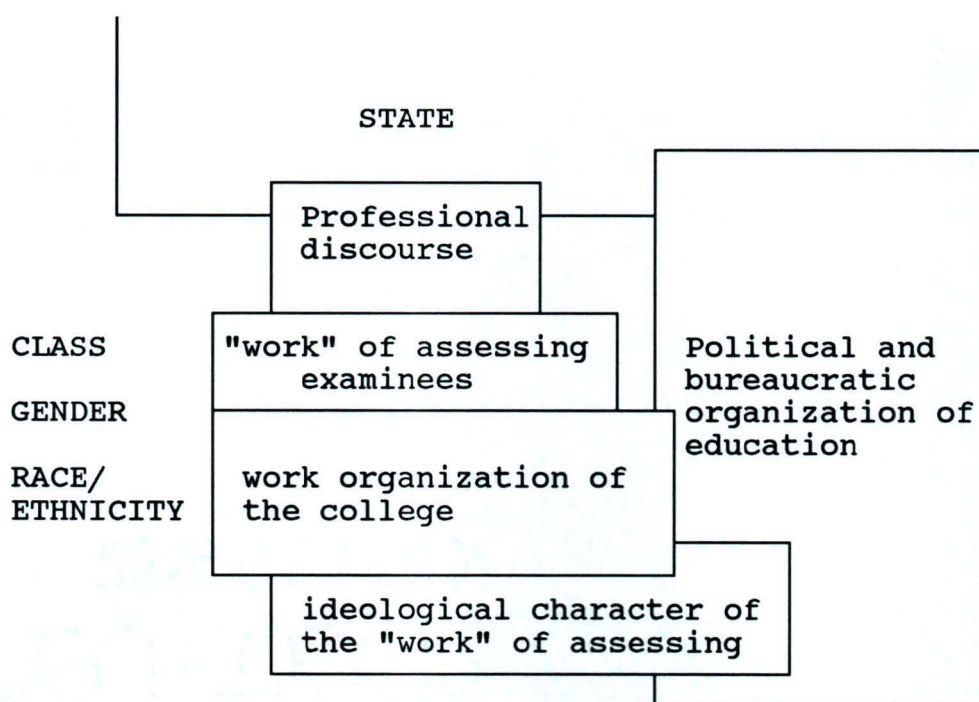
This section sketches out the necessary, and immediate social relations within which the assessment work process is embedded. The design is **not**, as Smith warns, a proposed theoretical model. It is a "cognitive map" intended to provide a preliminary sketch of the relevant relations "implicated in and organizing the everyday world. It is a means of extending the analysis from the level of the everyday analyzed as a work process to the expanded social relations in which that work process is embedded" (Smith, 1987:170).

The design embeds the work process in a complex of relations that organizes its social and material character. Specifically, the design "reproduces the 'focused' character of the approach which begins from a particular standpoint . . . and structures the representation of other relations from this perspective. It strives also to capture the coordinative interpenetration of different levels of social organization by the professional discourse" (Smith, 1987:171).

Figure 1 shows Smith's design, adapted and reformulated for the college assessment process.

Figure 1

The Relations of Assessment Work



In the design, which forms the organizational basis for this thesis, the "work of assessing examinees" is the initial experience; the point of entry into the complex of relations of assessment. The activities involved in assessing examinees organize the work process in concrete ways. For example, the type of assessment conducted (e.g., assessing English as a Second Language applicants) structures the work day for the assessment staff. The

timings of the tests and subtests, and the amount of individual attention examinees require determine how much processing work can be done during an assessment session.

The "work organization of the college" includes how assessment activities affect the structure and relations among college departments. In the community college studied here, the relation between assessment activity and the work organization of the college was such that as the number of the assessments increased there was a corresponding shift in the quantity of services offered to students and a qualitative transformation in the relations among departments. Departments were brought together (often for the first time) to discuss assessment related issues.

Within the "work organization of the college", the "ideological character of the 'work' of assessment" highlights the mediating function of assessment. That is, assessment work is ideological and it mediates the college's application process to "winners" and "losers". As Smith (1987: 161) notes, the "coordination of institutional processes is mediated ideologically". Workers learn the institutional ideologies and "recycle" their work experiences into forms which are recognizable within institutional discourse. The ideological character of assessment assists the institutional discourse to rationalize and legitimate its bureaucratic processes to the applicants, workers, and the state.

"Professional discourse" provides the necessary hegemonic support for the assessment practice and articulates the work process to the larger processes of the institution. Discourse organizes and re-organizes the relations among participants through the medium of their work. To be recognized as a participating and competent member of an organization one must be able to produce work in the appropriate form of style and terminology that is recognizable in the organization. In this manner professional discourse regulates the topics, themes, problems and conceptual practices.

"Political and bureaucratic organization of education" includes the broader relations between education and capitalism. Education is organized politically and bureaucratically to reproduce capitalist relations. The state regulates educational practices directly (e.g., through legislation) and indirectly (e.g., through funding educational research). Entry-level assessment provides one means through which the government may implement educational policies directly, without public input. Some implications for further assessment practices are examined in the conclusion to this thesis.

The design moves the analysis from concrete everyday activity to levels of progressively general and generalized relations. These general relations produce the concrete activity as part of the relations of the ruling apparatus.

The local experience is articulated to the larger generalized complex of social relations. There are necessary overlaps within and between the levels that correspond to the nature of entry-level assessment practices. Consequently, there is some repetition of practices at different analytical levels. The continuous nature of these practices is signified in Figure 1 by the open-ended box (i.e., labelled "state"). This is meant to illustrate the ongoing nature of entry-level assessment practices.

The next chapter establishes the local experience and examines the concrete process of assessment work. The analysis then moves to an examination of the "work" or assessing examinees and the broader work organization of the college. In the final two chapters I draw upon secondary literature to suggest how professional discourse and the political and bureaucratic organization of education might inform and constrain the everyday world of assessment workers. While this latter analysis falls short of the requirements for a full-fledged institutional ethnography, it highlights the practices to which such a study would need to attend.

Notes

1. This strategy is part of Smith's general critique of "mainstream sociology". It is a progressive step toward the development of a feminist sociology.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS: *Establishing the Local Experience*

This chapter describes the organization of entry-level assessment in a B.C. community college. The description establishes the local experience and situates assessment work within the work organization of the college. The following description is based on personal observations and recollections of my work experience in the assessment unit.

Development of Assessment

The entry-level assessment practices at the college developed over several years. The practices were developed within the political and economic priorities of the Social Credit government (except for a brief time in the early seventies when the New Democratic government was in office). Overall, the practices reflect accommodations made by the college to government mandates, missions, goals, policies, and funding practices. During my tenure at the assessment unit the Social Credit government continued its policies of "restraint" and "re-structuring" the B.C. economy that began publicly in 1983 (for analyses see, for example, Magnusson et al., 1984 and 1986; Kilian, 1985; Allen and Rosenbluth, 1986). The government's priorities of "decentralization" and "privatization" (Province of British Columbia, 1987) created, in part, some of the conditions within which assessment practices were developed.

Assessments were originally conducted by individual departments. However, as the number of applicants increased and college programs and courses expanded, the duplication of services with their attendant costs necessitated a change in the assessment practice. An office was established to conduct some of the departmental assessments. This office formed the basis for a free-standing assessment unit created in January 1987. The unit expanded rapidly. For example, the year before the assessment unit was established (1985-86) 1,495 applicants were tested. In 1986-87, 2,276 applicants were tested (a 52% increase) and in 1987-88, 3,866 applicants were tested (an increase of 70%)¹.

Initially, the testing office conducted assessments once or twice a week. With the creation of the assessment unit assessment sessions were extended to five days a week (two sessions per day) and one Saturday sitting a month. In addition to English assessment, the unit also conducted assessments for mathematics, trades programs, nursing, and English as a Second Language (ESL). There was no charge to examinees for the assessment.

The unit's staff increased from a one-person clerical position to a three-person office (occasionally up to five or six when work-study students were hired in April). Computer technology was introduced, including automated scoring of tests (except the essay component) and automated placement capability. When I joined the assessment unit it

was in transition from the one-person operation to a computerized system staffed by two persons.

Bureaucratic Organization of Assessment

As a process entry-level assessment was conducted within one college division responsible for providing services to students. Within the division one department was responsible for testing. The department was headed by a manager, there was an assessment counsellor to guide the activities of the assessment unit, a testing advisor, and a clerk².

Attached to the unit were three teachers of English who scored and assessed the written sample. Two were from departments within the college and one from an outside institution (one instructor was attached to the unit on a release basis, one was a full-time instructor of English at the college working part-time at the unit).

The assessment process was guided by an advisory committee. The committee, comprised of management and faculty from relevant departments, played an important role in the development of assessment practices. Committee recommendations included selection of the test instrument, the establishment of new entry thresholds for all English courses, the development of criteria for assessing writing skills, the addition of a written sample to the English test battery, and the implementation of an objective procedure (i.e., standardized) for the assessment of the written

sample.

The Assessment Process

The simplest way to describe the assessment process is to separate it into three stages, reflecting the examinee's perspective before, during, and after the assessment.

Before taking the English assessment applicants were referred to the assessment unit by college educational advisors or outside agencies. In some cases registered students were referred by instructors. Applicants would meet with college advisors to discuss their educational goals. The advisors would review the applicant's academic records (i.e., transcripts) to determine whether or not the applicant met the requirements of their program of choice (usually a "C" or higher in Grade 10 or Grade 12 English). If the applicant did not meet the academic requirement(s) of the program (or if their transcripts were out of date, i.e., more than 10 years) an assessment session was booked (using an appointment slip).

Instructors could book assessments for their students by contacting (either by phone or in person) the assessment staff. The instructor would briefly outline the nature of the student's problem and the staff member would schedule the appropriate assessment session.

Outside agencies (such as Employment and Immigration Canada) also booked assessment sessions for their clients. In these cases the agencies wanted to determine the academic

level of their clients for funding purposes. For example, Employment Canada provided funds for students to take certain upgrading (to Grade 12), trade (e.g., cooking), and service-oriented courses (e.g., cashier training). The assessment was conducted to establish not only the academic level of the client for the college program but also whether or not the client would be funded by Employment Canada during the course.

The appointment slips were organized by assessment staff according to the day and time of the assessment. This gave the staff some idea of how many people were scheduled to write at a particular time and day. The number of people determined whether additional space would be required or whether additional sessions should be scheduled.

The physical organization of the assessment unit consisted of three adjoining rooms. One room, the main assessing room, consisted of 40 desks arranged in five rows. The examinees faced a large window looking into the assessment office. The window allowed assessment staff to observe the examinees during the session (to keep track of "cheaters" and "peekers"). A second smaller room, adjacent to the main room was used for "overflow" crowds, special assessment sessions (e.g., those applicants requiring a more "personalized" service), and office operations. The main assessment office contained storage cabinets, desks, computer, and so on. One side of the office consisted of a

chest-high counter over which the "business" of the office was conducted. The counter was an effective barrier that separated the staff from the clients. Between the counter top and the ceiling was a folding curtain which could be opened or closed. Outside the office were several chairs and two-seat chairs for the examinees.

Entry-level English assessments were conducted five times a week. Each session took two to three hours. At the appointed time an assessment staff person would open the curtain and greet the examinees sitting outside. The greeting was deemed important to set the "mood" for the assessment session. Examinees were invariably nervous and some quite tense. A friendly smile and calm words helped relax the people and set the tone for the session. The most frequently asked questions by examinees were "Is this the right place?" and "Where is the washroom?"

The examinees were ushered into the assessment room and asked to fill out an information sheet. The sheet asked for the date, the examinee's name, social insurance number, address, highest or last grade completed, and a declaration that the examinee was physically able to write the assessment (i.e., was not sick).

A brief introduction and explanation of the assessment session was given by staff. The examinees were told that the assessment was designed to find out what their current English skill levels were so that the examinees could be

placed into a course in the college that matched their skill levels. The benefit from such a placement was that examinees could start their programmes of study at a level that would give them their best chance to succeed. The "bottom line" for the college was to encourage student success and assessment was one way to assist the examinees and the college. Assessment, examinees were told, helped the college maintain an "open-door" policy for educational access rather than a "revolving door". The "revolving door" occurred when people entered courses for which they were academically unprepared and then failed and/or dropped out (in the door and back out again).

After the information sheets were completed and collected, the test booklets were distributed. The college used the *Canadian Achievement Test, Form A* (standardized with a multiple-choice format) as the primary English assessment instrument. The last or highest grade given on the information sheet was used to determine the level of test booklet. For those examinees with Grade 10 or less the Level 18 CAT was issued, examinees with Grade 11 and higher got the Level 19. The difference between the two levels lay in the sophistication of the test content. Level 19, for example, contained more complex sentence structure and required higher levels of inference from reading passages. The procedures, described above, were conducted by assessment staff prior to each session.

During each session the following procedures took place. With each test booklet, each examinee received a machine readable answer sheet. The examinees were instructed, using an overhead projector, how to fill in their social insurance number (which became their student identity number), name, test date, and test name on the answer sheet. They were also instructed how to fill in the multiple-choice format by filling in the circle (A, B, C or D) for their answer choice. Care was taken by assessment staff to ensure the examinees understood how to do this properly because computer processing of a large volume of tests meant that errors would delay the processing of the results.

The instructions for the first test section were then read out or recited from memory by the assessment staff. The staff-person would then say, for example, "You have 12 minutes to complete this section - you may begin." The staff-person would observe the examinees for a few minutes to make sure things were going smoothly and then leave the room (observing from the assessment office). At the end of the allotted time, the staff-person would enter the session room and tell the examinees to stop writing. Instructions for the next section of the test would be given in the same manner.

At the conclusion of the timed sections, the test booklets and answer sheets were collected. Examinees were

then given material for the final part - a writing sample. A sheet of topics, a two-part carbonless writing form (for final draft), and scrap paper (for rough work) were given to each examinee. Examinees were told that they had one hour to write 100-400 words (3-4 paragraphs) on one of the topics. They were told to think about a topic and sketch out a rough outline on the scrap paper but to hand in their essay, written in ink, on the carbonless paper. Again, examinees were reminded of the benefits to them of a written sample. At the end of one hour the writing samples were collected (if examinees finished earlier they could leave) and the examinees were bid adieu.

After the assessment session the examinees would return on the stated day to pick up their assessment results at the assessment office counter. The results were in the form of a letter addressed personally to each examinee giving their score on each part of the assessment, the result in terms of a placement into a course, and information of how to proceed to the next step (for example, go to registration with the results to register for the stated course, or perhaps the name of a contact person for remedial work). Assessment staff would go over each examinee's results personally, explain what each part meant in terms of the test itself, the college's cut-off scores (test scores that were translated into grade equivalents which corresponded to college entrance requirements), opportunities to register in

courses and/or programs, and financial aid advice.

Any problems or questions examinees might have with the test or their placement were dealt with by the staff at the counter. For some people, a re-write of part, or a substantial portion, of the assessment was arranged, others might be interviewed by the instructor attached to the assessment unit, while others might be referred to an appropriate college person (e.g., the registrar, an administrator, or counsellor).

From the examinees' perspective the assessment process described above was separated into three stages. However, for assessment staff the "work" of administering the tests, collecting and entering the information into the computer, producing the assessment letters, distributing the information to the relevant college departments, responding to questions and problems from college personnel, examinees, other colleges, and the public did not fall neatly into three stages. A lot of the work was done while the examinees wrote the assessment. When the examinee information sheet was collected by the staff-person, the information was used to create a computer file on a personal computer.

Each examinee had her or his own file in the computer containing the information on the information sheet. When the multiple-choice sections were completed the answer sheets were visually inspected by staff for any errors or

omissions. Any stray pencil marks on the answer sheets were erased and the examinee's answers were checked to make sure the pencil marks were kept within the pre-printed circle, not more than one answer per item, and the pencil marks were not too light or too dark. The answer sheets were then fed manually through an optical scanner. The scanner would accept correct sheets and reject those with errors. The errors were corrected by the staff-person and run through the scanner again. The optical scanner scored the number of correct answers and recorded that number in the appropriate field in the examinee's computer file.

The examinee's writing sample was distributed to the three teachers of English for marking. The writing samples were graded separately by the three markers. The essays were scored according to a standardized, written scoring guide.

The instructor assigned to the assessment unit then reviewed the three essay marks. Any discrepancies were discussed at weekly marker meetings and a single score assigned. The marked essays were given to assessment staff who then entered the essay mark into the person's computer file. The essay mark completed the raw scores necessary for the placement stage.

A summary sheet of the examinee's composite score was produced. The summary sheet consisted of examinee social insurance number, the score on each of the test sections,

the essay mark, and placement level (e.g., Grade 12 English, or upgrade English in the Adult Basic Education Department). The sheet was reviewed by the instructor to ensure the placement was within the prescribed score range adopted by the college.

If the scores for each of the test sections (including writing) fell within the range assigned each placement level, a result letter (addressed to the examinee) was generated automatically by the computer program. However, any scores outside the placement range(s) were labelled "adjudicate" and had to be examined by the instructor. The examinee's answer sheet and writing sample were re-examined by the instructor. If these reviews did not result in a clear placement level the examinee was contacted and asked to come in to discuss the assessment with the instructor.

At the interview the instructor asked about the examinee's educational goals, recent educational experiences, current activities (e.g., reading and writing activities) and any extenuating circumstances that might account for her or his performance on the assessment (e.g., was the examinee recently divorced, a single-parent, too nervous or stressed at the assessment session). A decision was made (either a placement level or re-write) on the basis of the interview and test results.

The distribution of the assessment results was the final stage of the processing. The assessment letter was

printed on a carbonless, colour-coded, multiple-copy form. The examinee received a copy, a copy went to registration (when the examinee registered the results went into their personal file), a copy went to the department corresponding to the placement level (e.g., English or Adult Basic Education Departments), and a copy went into the paper file at the assessment unit.

A monthly statistical report for management was compiled giving the numbers of people writing, the placement outcomes for each assessment category, numbers of rewrites, and so on. In addition to the monthly reports the unit also conducted, from time to time, studies examining issues and/or problems emerging from the college's assessment process.

The above description of the assessment process establishes the local experience that situates the actual work process in its material conditions. The next chapter begins the analysis of the broader implications of the work process within the college.

Notes

1. Unpublished document, January 24, 1989.
2. It should be noted that the positions of authority (i.e., division and department head) were held by males. Within the centre itself, with the exception of myself (male), the remaining positions were held by females. In 1990 several associate director positions were created and 3 or 4 females were promoted to fill these new positions. However, the authority positions within the college, as suggested by Smith's (1987) analysis, remain the exclusive domain of men.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE "WORK" OF ASSESSING EXAMINEES

This chapter examines the immediate relations inherent in assessment work. The assessment process constitutes a ruling practice that is not just a technical matter of managing entry "efficiently" and operating the college "effectively". The immediate and initial relations are those most visible to examinees and assessment workers. The most critical and necessary are relations between the assessment workers and the test writers. Indeed, were there no test writers there would be no need for assessment workers.

On the surface the relationship between examinees and assessment workers appears straight forward. Examinees come to the assessment unit to be administered a test by workers, the results of which allow (or deny) examinees access to college courses and/or programs. It is at this moment (when examinees approach the counter) in the assessment process that the relation between examinees' educational goals (in part, informed by the ideology of access) and the "realities" of the practice is most obvious. Until the moment when examinees are asked (or "required") to actually *do* something (i.e., write a test) their educational goals and aspirations are in the realm of "ideas"¹. The most immediate relation between examinees and workers transforms these ideas into practice. However, there are

contradictions between the principle (or "idea") of educational opportunities as claimed in liberal education and their practice.

Within the immediate relations two aspects are examined in this chapter: the creation of a "non-threatening" testing environment, and the test instrument. Both these aspects of assessment practice organize the relations between workers and examinees. Analysis of these aspects of assessment practice offers us insight into the social relations of entry-level assessment and how ruling is accomplished in it, in spite of the "good" intentions of assessment workers and the resistance of examinees.

Examinee Resistance to Entry-level Assessment

This section examines how the workers' activities are directed toward overcoming examinee resistance to assessment. For examinees, the requirement for writing an assessment is problematic. Some examinees are not at all convinced that assessment is necessary while others are more concerned about the mechanics of the assessment itself (i.e., types and number of questions, essay topics, etc.). In its most obvious form, resistance to the assessment is demonstrated when examinees refuse to continue the test and walk out of the testing room (sometimes in dramatic fashion)². Thus, entry-level assessment, in practical terms, represents a barrier to examinees' plans and goals. Several methods are used by the workers (and college) to deal with

examinees' resistances to assessment.

One method used the aspects of "voluntarism" in the assessment process. Initially, people are "allowed" to select programs of their choice. Associated within the program choices people make are the entrance requirements for the program. Their previous educational achievements then determine whether or not an assessment is necessary. People are also "free" to change their educational goals and, perhaps, to avoid the necessity of writing an assessment. Through the "voluntary" aspects of program choice people consent to assessments as a means toward their educational goal. Assessment workers use the voluntarist aspects by referring examinees to the entrance requirements of the program they had selected, as a way to rationalize the examinee's obligation to write the assessment³. Thus, this aspect of assessment practice contributes to "ruling" by making it seem like a personal choice to sit the assessment test.

The examinees' program choice and the workers' use of that choice to rationalize the assessment illustrates the application of Willis's term "cultural limitation". That is, the materials and resources of cultural production are the "raw materials" used to ameliorate examinee resistance to assessment. This does not suggest that the workers are in some way separate from the culture. It does suggest that the dominating ideologies are reciprocally related in

practice. The ideologies are not imposed *downward* from a dominant social group; they are *internal* relations among groups or, in Willis's (1977: 160) terms, "internal cultural relationships". In practice, the voluntary aspects of program choice are used to confirm the relation between people's aspirations embodied in their educational goals and the ideology of access. At the same time the voluntarist aspects are used to deny the possibility of authentic alternatives. The hegemonic influence of the dominating ideologies is expressed by Willis (1977: 161) as follows:

Though they [ideologies] do not directly intervene in the subjective and cultural penetration of labour power, they play over, work up, and accentuate the real experiential processes.

Appeals to the voluntary aspect, however, are only available to assessment workers at the very beginning of the process. Once involved in the assessment, examinees enter into relations which, they may discover, have implications in addition to their choice of program. For example, the assessment was "harder" than they expected, or they did not, or could not, complete the essay component. Assessment workers then use other methods to deal with examinee resistance.

One method was to structure for examinees conditions that support a caring concern that is sensitive to the needs of the individual. The creation of a non-threatening testing environment illustrates an instance of the workers' "good intentions". These conditions were created in two

ways: one involved the physical environment, the other the social and work environment. The "school" look of the testing room was softened by decorating it with pictures, and repainting the walls. The office area was organized to create "open" spaces and allow examinees (and workers) easy access. What the workers attempted to do was to "de-school" the environment in which examinees wrote the tests. Workers were, however, severely limited in their re-decorating efforts because of lack of funds.

The workers' lack of control over a budget locates another relation that mediates the initial and immediate worker/examinee relations, viz., the relation between the employer and worker. The relation between assessment workers and the college is explored in some detail in Chapter Five. At this point in the analysis, the employer/worker relation is examined briefly.

While the relations between employer (embodied by management) and assessment workers were generally cooperative and cordial, the "prime weapon of the employer in disciplining labour - the power to hire and fire" (Bowles and Gintis, 1976: 11) was ever present. In part, workers' activities were guided by institutional norms internalized by the workers and, in part, activities were conducted within the context of coercive relations inherent in the labour process. Workers' efforts to control and use the assessment budget (e.g., to create a non-threatening

physical testing environment) brought into sharp relief the ultimate coercive authority of the employer. Since there was little assessment workers could do, in practical ways, to increase the assessment budget (or re-distribute funds), the primary focus of their efforts and attention turned to creating a non-threatening "social" environment.

In the creation of a non-threatening social environment an important component consists of meeting "individual needs"⁴. This idea was stressed by workers, not only in the introduction to each session but also in subsequent discussions with examinees. Efforts to address "individual needs" helped connect examinees and workers. A concrete example is found in a product of assessment workers' labour, viz., the assessment letter reporting the results.

The letter format and content were consciously and deliberately designed to be "personalized", addressing each examinee by name, and to be as free of college jargon as possible. The letter was evidence that the assessment workers and the college were meeting, or at least trying to meet, examinees' individual needs. In practical ways the letter also continually reinforced the individual nature of the assessment: it was addressed to a person and every letter reminded assessment workers of this simple fact.

The ways assessment workers interacted with examinees also stressed the "individual". The informal "chats" with examinees at the assessment counter prior to the session,

discussions with people on the telephone, and reviews of assessment results were framed by the worker's sensitivity to individual needs. Assessment workers often received positive feedback from examinees, management, and instructors about this approach, thus reinforcing the emphasis on the "individual".

The analysis has focused on worker attempts to legitimate the assessment process to examinees thereby reducing examinees' resistance to assessment. There is another side in which assessment workers express resistance to elements of the assessment process. The worker resistance was qualitatively different from that of the examinees. Workers took some "liberties" with the timing of the test subsections. The "official" test time, as outlined in the *Test Coordinator's Handbook* (1982), would be informally increased, from time to time, by one to two minutes. Similarly, from time to time, examinees would be allowed to finish their writing sample beyond the "official" time. Increases in test times benefitted the examinees by allowing them more time to finish their "work". These efforts to treat people as individuals were not created independently from the college. They were the result of formal and informal developmental processes.

The formal aspects were provided by college management, particularly the division management. The college policy emphasized and "individualized" approach to assessment.

That is, the material for expressing "individual needs" was structured for divisional workers through a document distributed by the division management outlining the division's "philosophy" or "shared basic beliefs". One of the "beliefs" stressed was:

USERS' NEEDS FIRST

We believe our FIRST responsibility is to the STUDENTS, the COLLEGE and the COMMUNITY who use our service. In meeting THEIR NEEDS everything we do must be of HIGH QUALITY. Everyone who walks in the door, writes to the College or calls on the telephone will be treated with COURTESY, UNDERSTANDING, and RESPECT (Unpublished document, February 20, 1989).

This belief was articulated and supported by management at management-organized luncheons at which the workers discussed the basic beliefs with the division head. At regular divisional meetings the set of guidelines were routinely used to motivate workers and rationalize divisional plans. Another element in meeting individual needs was the notion of a "partnership". The "basic beliefs" document sketched out its general form:

PARTNERS IN STUDENT SUCCESS

We are committed, along with everyone in the College, to the common goal of STUDENT LEARNING. Our challenge, therefore, is to continually seek ways to CONTRIBUTE TOGETHER with College Personnel, to the INTELLECTUAL and PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT of STUDENTS; in other words, to be EDUCATORS (Unpublished document, February 20, 1989).

Underlying this statement is a view of examinee/worker relations that emphasizes the individual in a co-operative partnership. In addition, the idea that workers were also

educators had strong appeal for the workers, especially in the assessment unit where two of the workers were taking a course to upgrade their academic qualifications. The concept of "partners" unified the workers with faculty and students with a shared identity. It placed the workers within the division into a common relationship to people whether they were called examinees, applicants, students, or faculty.

The "basic belief" guidelines provided the raw materials for the workers to fashion concrete practices⁵. This meant, for assessment workers, that "individual needs" and "partnership" were woven into the fabric of assessment practices. Assessment workers took those ideas and blended them with the requirements for conducting an assessment (such as creating and maintaining a non-threatening environment). This process is illustrated in the creation of the introduction given at each session.

It will be recalled that prior to each session examinees were told the benefits of assessment. Two aspects were stressed: benefits to examinees and benefits to the college. For examinees, assessments were aimed at measuring their English skill levels so they may begin their programme of study at a level appropriate to their skill levels. For the college, assessment and placement assisted in maintaining an "open-door" policy. The "open-door" policy of the college (and thus examinee expectations) was

qualified in terms of the need to reduce the student attrition rate (i.e., the number of drop-outs) by contrasting an "open-door" policy to a "revolving-door" policy. The suggestion to examinees was that the assessment practices at the college enhance student success by ensuring students have the requisite skills *before* registering in program courses. People are not as likely to enter the "open-door" of the college and revolve back out again. In significant ways, the introduction to the assessment sessions structured for examinees the terms of the "partnership" regarding the college's entrance standards and expectations of the level of academic skills required for any one program.

In following the college's policy, the "good intentions" of the workers coincided with college policy. The workers' "hearts and minds" were thus integrated with college policy.

The development of an introduction that gave examinees, in concrete terms, a "realistic" view of the assessment process *and* met the division's basic beliefs took place over many months and went through several revisions. Using the "trial and error" method, assessment workers observed examinees' reactions for each version. The format and content for each version were decided upon through informal conversations among the workers. When satisfactory reactions from examinees were consistently observed the

format and content of the introduction was written down and distributed to the workers as the "standardized" version.

Thus, the structuring of relations between examinees and workers consisted, in part, of the workers reproducing an institutional ideology that was created by the workers to fit into a particular practice. The development of the assessment's introduction reveals the ways in which institutional ideas are transformed and given concrete expression through the actions of the workers. This is an instance of ruling, through the construction of an introduction, that articulates "test taking" to the needs of the college. In essence, it builds each examinee into the college perspective and thus denies other critical perspectives. The work of assessment is the process of bringing examinees into an ideologically constructed relation to the college.

Thus far the analysis has revealed that examinees' potential resistance to assessment was initially ameliorated by the work of the staff which reinforced the voluntary aspect of program selection to examinees. Once examinees were involved in the assessment activity other strategies were used, specifically the creation of a non-threatening test writing environment. Resource limitations forced workers to concentrate on the social rather than physical aspects of the examinees' environment.

Within the social aspect workers used the concepts of

"individual needs" and "partnership" to develop non-threatening conditions. These notions also helped workers to orient examinees to their test writing task. The same notions articulated by the local agency of ruling - the division management in a document of "shared basic beliefs" and through discussions with workers.

The development of the assessment introduction illustrates Smith's (1987: 133) argument that social relations "do not exist in an abstract formal space organized purely conceptually, but as determinate actual processes". Work involves taking courses of action in sequences that precede, that exist within, and that project the future organization of social relations. The relationship between social relations and contradictions within the division of labour also implies relations external to and independent of individual choice or will. The next section will examine a principal contradiction within the work of assessment.

The work of assessing examinees is characterized by opposition inherent in its practice. Thus far, we have discussed practices that structure and organize the assessments that function to integrate people into coordinated activities. A significant aspect opposing the individual/partnership emphasis of the workers is contained in the very process of assessment.

This process works to abstract from individual examinees their capacity to be "competent practitioners of their everyday world" (Smith, 1987: 166). That capacity is replaced by organized social relations that "suspend the particular subjectivities of knower and known in such a way that its character as a social relation disappears" (Smith, 1987: 73). The mechanism for abstraction is the test instrument.

The Test Instrument

The *Canadian Achievement Tests (CAT), Form A (Levels 18 and 19)* are the primary instruments used to assess entry-level English. The *CAT* is the most commonly used instrument in B.C. colleges to assess English skills for entry-level placement (Rennie, 1991). A brief description will acquaint the reader with the basic features of the *CAT*.

The *CAT* is a Canadian revision of the *California Achievement Tests*. The standardization sample was drawn from a Canadian school population and the test objectives were based on the "objectives stated in recent curriculum guides, and other instructional material used by school systems in all parts of Canada" (Test Coordinator's Handbook, 1982: 2). The multiple-choice test measures achievement in five content areas: Reading, Spelling, Language, Mathematics, and Reference Skills. Only the sections on Reading, Spelling, and Language were used at the assessment unit.

According to test authors, the *CAT* is a

unique, comprehensive information system for educational evaluation. They [*CAT*] represent a major advance in achievement testing because they combine the reporting of both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced information. This reporting combination provides extensive data on the relative ranking of students against either a national norm group or local norm group of their peers. It also provides information on individual and group performance on specified objectives (*CAT*, 1982: 1).

An additional "benefit" of the *CAT* is called "functional level testing":

Functional level testing (testing each student with materials of appropriate difficulty) was an important concern in the development of the *Canadian Achievement Tests*. Test materials were designed so that schools could select the level that would best measure the achievement of each student. This flexibility of testing maximizes the usefulness of test results and minimizes the frustration or waste of time that can occur when a student is administered a test that is either above or below that student's achievement level (1982: 2).

Test items in the *CAT* were written to measure performance on selected educational objectives. Because an objective subsumes two or more related skills, it represents a category of skills and is called a *category objective*. Category objectives, described in the *Test Coordinator's Handbook* (1982), take, for example, the following form:

The student will be able to . . .

- identify words or phrases that have same or similar meaning [Reading section, 1982: 57];
- infer meaning of words from context [Reading Comprehension section, 1982: 58];
- identify sentence sequence or irrelevant sentence in a paragraph [Language Expression, 1982: 59]

There was a common but unstated assumption at the assessment unit that the objectives measured by the test instrument were representative of the types of skills examinees would need in their courses.

Test-writing is a form of discursive practice. It will be recalled that Smith (1987: 60) views discourse like a conversation in which "utterances are abstracted from particular participants located in particular spatiotemporal settings". Unlike conversations, however, discourse is mediated by texts. "Texts are the medium of a knowledge that is a property of organization rather than of individual" (Smith, 1987: 212). Texts are understood to be "embedded in and organizing relations among subjects active in the discourse" (Smith, 1987: 214). The importance of test discourse is that it represents "actual ongoing practices and sites of practices" (ibid.). While the text may appear, to examinees, a fixed and stable attribute of the test, the discourse within which the text is located is a continuously changing site of practices where actual people enter into actual relations within one another (Smith, 1987: 214). A practice conducted at each assessment session that explicates the test discourse as a site of practices is examined below.

In the assessment process, a critical moment for examinees occurs when they are given a test booklet. Despite the significance placed on "functional level

testing" in the *Handbook*, it was not utilized as such by the assessment workers. In its place, the functional levels were transformed into "functional level *distribution*". That is, the level of test each examinee received was determined by either the requirements of a program or by the last grade completed by the examinee. Some programs required a Level 18 or Level 19. Examinees who had completed Grade 10 English or below were given a Level 18 while Grade 11 and above received a Level 19 booklet.

The distribution of test booklets is critical for two reasons: it introduces a form of bias external to that which may already exist in the test construction, and it structures social relations.

First, in addition to the direct connection between the CAT 18/19 and college entrance requirements there is a concealed connection. The level of booklet is associated with placement levels. That is, based on their experiences and observations the assessment workers found that the Level 18 tended to be easier and yielded higher scores (and thus placement levels) than Level 19. When there was any doubt by assessment workers, and if the assessment worker had a choice between Level 19 and Level 18, the examinee was given the benefit of the doubt and given a Level 18. At this juncture, and if the worker had a choice, the choice of test booklet she or he makes effectively enhances or reduces the examinee's chances of a high scores thus affecting their

placement level. This practice illustrates another instance of "assessment as ruling" in that the workers' "good intentions" are practices whereby the workers attempt to "advocate" on behalf of the examinee (by bending the rules, and soothing anxieties) which unintentionally support the "correct" outcome of the tests; to differentiate and reproduce class, gender, and racial labour force.

It has been argued that tests, such as the achievement type, are biased in systematic ways that serve to support existing inequalities (Thomas, 1986; Ungerleider, 1987; and Henry, 1988). Henry, for example, argues the Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test (ASAT) draws on the "cultural capital of schooling - the esoterica of abstract knowledge, decontextualised learning and a good working relationship with words and numbers" by emphasizing mathematics such that the test (ASAT) actually "reinforces the existing biases in schooling by promoting a view of ability and knowledge that closely reflects the definition of ability and knowledge promoted by schooling" (Henry, 1988: 301-303). The distribution practices conducted at the assessment session may skew any existing biases even further by introducing "distribution bias". The distribution of test booklets, based on an individual assessment worker's informal and often immediate appraisal of an examinee's ability, is a form of agency that creates the dynamic for the test discourse to be a site of ongoing practices. Thus, for

examinees, receiving a brown (Level 18) booklet or a green one (Level 19) may have little significance. It is, however, a crucial moment in their assessment. The test discourse, at the college, reflects not only a formal structure (i.e., the "official" connection between test level and placement level) but informal practices which, on the whole, introduce an unknown and perhaps random bias into the placement activities that organize the relations between examinees and workers. Furthermore, the discourse organizes those relations independent of the examinees and does not take into account their capacity to know their own skill levels.

Second, the test instrument is itself a form of textual reality that structures social relations (Smith, 1990). When examinees are given a test booklet, they are presented with a published, final form of test questions and a number of responses. The "physicality" of the test represents "objectified forms of reality" that "structure the relation between knower and known" (Smith, 1990: 62-63). That is, the social organization which produces the test is, for examinees, hidden. Invisible, at the physical level of the text, are the ways the test items were developed, such as a large staff of qualified (experienced teachers) "item writers [who] developed test materials and items that met previously defined objectives and specifications" (*Test Coordinator's Handbook*, 1982: 9)⁶. The "textual reality" of

the test instrument presupposes conceptions of reality which may not accurately reflect the lived experiences of the examinees. The effect of the test writing process is to separate examinees from their bases of knowing in their daily experiences, thus abstracting them from their "lived" social relations.

Also invisible at the physical level of the text, are the capitalist relations of production within which the test publisher (McGraw-Hill Ryerson) and distributor (Canadian Test Centre) develop, publish, and sell the tests as a commodity in a multi-million dollar market within a network of other national and international publishers, or the purchase of the commodity by the college and its implementation of it as the basis for educational decision making. The test, as Smith (1990: 63) would argue, is "textually mediated reality" that "incorporates the social organization of its production and the courses of action separating it from people's lived actualities".

At the moment of opening the test booklets examinees enter into what Smith (1990) calls, "textual time". This is the only mode of knowing that is available to examinees. In textual time the text is stable and fixed.

It [text] has no apparent history other than that incorporated in it and does not acquire one as a product of various occasions of its use. Fixed in an official form (for instance, by publication), it is the same on each occasion of its reading (Smith, 1990: 74-75).

The significance of textual time is that "social and technical organization is not apparent in the final product" (Smith, 1990: 63). Examinees' daily experiences and capacities to be competent knowers of their world are separated from their lived actualities when they enter textual time.

What *is* visible to the examinees in the booklets are passages of prose and poetry and questions about synonyms, homonyms, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The content of the test (i.e., prose, poetry, and statements) further abstracts people from their lived experiences and from reference to their daily lives because the test is composed of works of fiction rather than accounts of facts. There are important differences between the two.

The advantage of a "factual" account, such as a news story, is that the reader can, in principle, check the account against the actuality to which it refers. Smith (1990) calls this "reading through" an account to determine "what actually happened/what is". "Reading through" traces the social organization producing the account to reveal the structure, syntax, and conceptual organization of the account. The social organization of "facticity" is "an inner coherence between the actuality thus represented and the statements that can be made about it" which produces "objectified knowledge"; a "product of an institutional order mediated by texts" (Smith 1990: 78 and 80). Thus, the

factual account allows a reader to keep some connection between the manufacture of the account, its basis in some independently existing event, and the reader's own lived experiences.

Fiction, on the other hand, does not have the advantage of allowing a "reading through" of an account to determine what actually happened. Smith states that:

In reading fiction, readers use methods that do not refer back to an actuality existing independently of the work of fiction; details in the fictional account cannot be checked out, or if they were to be checked out, the implication for the fictional account would be indeterminate; readers don't expect, though they might like, to know what happened to the people in the story after it has ended (Smith, 1990: 76).

While the test authors claim that "content considerations were of paramount importance during development" (*Test Coordinator's Handbook*, 1982: 8) there is no mention of the facticity of the content.

In the content of the *CAT*, Level 18 (1981), for example, there are no selections that could be considered an account of some actually occurring event that exists independently of the text (such as a news report). Among the passages in the Reading Comprehension section are passages from a "captain's log" (1981: R14), the "text of a radio commercial" (1981: R9), a "salesperson's speech about a product" (1981: R8), and a poem (1981: R12). Question items regarding these passages are designed to measure "critical comprehension", specifically, a correct response to the question items indicates that the

student will be able to determine persuasion techniques used, such as negative and positive words, transfer, testimonial, appeal to join, inadequate information, and purpose (*Test Coordinator's Handbook*, 1981: 57-58).

There is a tacit assumption in the test that links the visible text to the invisible social relations. Giltrow (1990: 15) states that "questions take as already known and confirmed certain assumptions about the text". In the case of the "salesperson's speech about a product", for instance, the question presupposes as established and mutually known the fact that people will not only recognize persuasion techniques but will be able to distinguish among several techniques such as testimonial, transfer, and inadequate information. The test authors presuppose a type and form of "social experience" that may, or, more importantly may not, reflect the examinee's actual experiences. There are inherent in the passage hidden assumptions and connections to social organization of which people may not be consciously aware or, "if the speaker [or reader] does know what is going on, he or she is under great pressure not to resist it" (Fowler and Kress, 1979: 195).

The text claims for itself, in its objectified form, an "authority as socially accomplished effects or products" (Smith, 1990: 61). The authority and power of the text "arises in the distinctive organization it imparts to social relations" (Smith, 1990: 70). The test items presuppose an "organization of power as the concerting of people's activities and the uses of organization to enforce processes

producing a version of the world that is peculiarly one-sided, that is known only from within the modes of ruling, and that defines the objects of its power" (Smith, 1990: 83-84). The authority of textual reality and the power of the ruling relations that underlie it are such that people tend to accept this power and authority. Giltrow (1990) argues that, in addition to the authority of the text, the assessment procedures "install authority and control reading" which excludes the possibility of answers other than those deemed "correct" by the test authors. For Giltrow, the expectation for students to be critically aware (or for the test writer to comprehend critically) is opposed by the experience of assessment which

suggests that knowledge is not historical and temporary but absolute and permanent, not constructed by communities but secured in the vaults of Provincial Authority (where the main features of the medieval world are inscribed once-and-for-all), they [students] are ill-prepared to participate in critical practice (Giltrow, 1990: 14).

Thus, the structures of the assessment procedures are themselves antithetical to the expression and recognition of critical thought. The convention of the "isolated fact about form or figure makes no provision for coherent reflection on the role of style in the reader's experience of the text" (Giltrow, 1990: 15). Furthermore, the emphasis on the "correct" answer detracts significantly, and may bear no relevance to the "ability, trait, or characteristic" the test attempts to measure (Hoffmann, 1962: 81). Giltrow's

insights suggest that examinee resistance to the assessment, exhibited in the form of "anxiety" about "what is on the test", is grounded in people's experiences reflecting control and authority in social relations that emphasize the "correct" answer rather than critical thought. Giltrow observes that:

even if the assessment instrument is culturally embedded and consistent with cultural values, we might reconsider it nevertheless, for it seems to exert undue influence on students' responses out of proportion, perhaps, to its [test's] actual role in their educational experience (Giltrow, 1990: 15).

In test writing activities there are social relations not immediately apparent to the test writers. These social relations, however, structure the examinee's test writing experiences in ways that are independent of individual choice. One mechanism is the emphasis on the "correct" answer: an emphasis that overrides the intended measurement goals of the test.

Overall, the activity of test writing which separates and abstracts individuals from their known (and knowing) experiences opposes efforts by assessment workers to unite, in realistic terms, the examinees with their test writing activities. Thus, within the assessment process the opposition between unifying examinees with their assessment and processes that abstract them forms a unity. This unity of opposites forms the basis for the development (i.e., self-development) of the assessment practices at the college. That is, the tendency of the assessment process to

abstract and alienate examinees generates the conditions workers sought to remedy by creating conditions amenable to unifying examinees and assessment thereby enhancing examinee co-operation and limiting examinee resistance to assessment.

This chapter examined the immediate relations between examinees and workers. On the surface, the relations are characterized by a voluntary association stressing "individual needs" and "partnership". However, once entered into, the process of assessment structures for examinees social relations that are independent of their choice. Examinees' capacity as "competent knowers" of their daily experiences is denied by the social organization inherent in the test instrument, and the activities of the assessment workers. Examinees are thus subordinate to the social relations structured for them by the assessment workers. The assessment workers, while creatively active in structuring non-threatening conditions for examinees, are agents of the relations of ruling inscribed in the test instrument. The dialectical concept "unity of opposites" describes the self-developing character of assessment whereby assessment practices are created by workers to mediate the abstracting effects of the test instrument which, in turn, creates qualitatively different conditions for examinees, the assessment workers, and the work organization of the college.

Notes

1. The test writing activity represents the unity between thinking and practice. As Leontyev (1981: 250) writes:

The common nature of external, practical activity and the inner activity of ideas is not limited simply to the community of their structure. It is also psychologically essential that they both equally, though differently, link man with the world around him, which is consequently reflected in his head, that both the one and the other form of activity is mediated by a mental reflection of reality, and that they are equally intelligent, meaningful processes.

2. For one examinee, leaving in the middle of a session (ostensibly for a bathroom visit) was more than resistance to the assessment session. This individual was an inmate at a correctional facility and used the assessment as an opportunity to exercise his own form of choice (much to the guard's consternation!). Subsequently, assessments were conducted by college instructors within the correctional facility.
3. Farley suggests that "voluntarism" has implications beyond the individual level. He argues that voluntarism provides a reason for "non-intervention by government" in funding educational programs. That is, people voluntarily seeking to upgrade their education through their "own initiative and personal effort" receive "little or no assistance from either government or employer" precisely because people willingly and voluntarily engage in academic upgrading (Farley, 1985: 74).
4. The concept of "individual needs" has developed from a progressive philosophy that education must meet the needs of individual children. However, as this concept has developed in association with standardized testing, it has become a justification for "streaming", i.e., homogeneous ability-grouping of people (Bleasdale, 1978: 28).
5. This process is similar to the teacher's activities described in Smith's analysis (see Chapter Two). The curriculum provided, for the teacher, the "barebones", whereas, for assessment workers, the "basic beliefs" replaces the curriculum.

6. Other aspects of test development include the various trials to polish the tests (e.g., teachers who administered the tryout editions reviewed the contents and "numerous improvements in the tests reflect the comments and suggestions from these teachers" (*Handbook*, 1982: 9), and standardization procedures used to develop the norm tables (i.e., a "sample of 76,000 students from Grades 1 to 12 was drawn by stratified random sampling from national public and separate school populations" (1982: 11).

CHAPTER FIVE

WORK ORGANIZATION OF THE COLLEGE

In this chapter the analysis moves from relations between assessment workers and examinees to relations between assessment workers and other workers within the institution. That is, the analysis moves to a level beyond the immediately given experiences of assessment workers and examinees to examine the relations between assessment work and the overall practices of the college. Assessment work furthers the college work of ruling through the concessions offered to examinees (e.g., re-writes and remedial courses).

The practical activities of educational workers are organized, coordinated, regulated, guided, and controlled through institutional processes and they reflect these processes. Smith (1987: 160) views institutions as "nodes or knots in the relations of the ruling apparatus to class, coordinating multiple strands of action into a functional complex". The combined activities of the "institutional modes" identify a "complex of relations forming part [in this case the educational aspect] of the ruling apparatus" (ibid.).

The work of assessment is embedded within the work organization of the college. The college is an institution that creates the conditions necessary for assessment work. Not only are the physical conditions created (e.g., office and testing space, purchasing of assessment tools such as

forms, paper, pens and pencils, test instruments, and the hiring of labour) but the ideological conditions, as well, are structured within and by the institution. The institutional conditions also include bureaucratic organization of workers, such as a hierarchical division of labour and legal-rational procedures which form orderly processes and a determinate form of social organization.

One characteristic of capitalism, according to Smith (1987: 158), is that its inherent social relations translate the "particular and concrete into abstracted and generalized forms". Educational institutions are crucial sites within which people's actual local experiences are generalized into abstract and general forms. Assessment workers are uniquely placed within the bureaucratic organization of the college and in relations between the college organization and the community, to facilitate the abstraction processes. Assessment work contributes significantly to the generalizing processes of institutional relations that legitimate the college's educational practices to the community. Following is an examination of the concrete practices of assessment work that abstract and generalize the actual and particular activities of examinees and workers.

Institutional Practices

The work of assessment contributes to the overall work organization of the college in at least three ways; it facilitates the work organization of other college departments, it provides a venue for improved inter-departmental communication, and it is a site for the collection, distribution, and production of assessment information (and knowledge).

Assessment work is unique in the work organization of the college because of its relations with 10 (or so) college departments. The assessment unit is immediately related to other units of the college concerned with registration, educational advising, work and personal (psychological) counselling, student financial aid, and the various departments and programs (e.g., Adult Special and Adult Basic Education, English, Nursing, and English as a Second Language Departments and programs such as cooks training, and office administration) for which the unit assesses applicants. The assessment workers have routine, if not daily, contact with these college departments. The assessment unit is, thus, a nodal point within the college providing different functions for these departments.

Assessment work facilitates the work organization within different departments. For some departments (e.g., Adult Basic Education and Nursing), the unit conducts the initial assessing work, thereby freeing departmental

resources (such as instructor's time, and money) for other departmental purposes. For registration and admissions, the volumes of applicants assessed are used as a rough approximation of the number of people who might register. This estimation informs a work schedule for the admissions clerks. Similarly, for financial aid the assessment volumes give some indication of the number of people eligible for aid and the type of aid program. Those departments with the assessment information are able to anticipate what services might be needed and to adjust their own work organization accordingly.

In the college under study, assessment practices also brought previously autonomous and dispersed activities (i.e., assessing the academic skill levels of various applicants) into a centralized activity. Previously there were little or no formal connections between college departments (although informal, personal links and networks existed). Each department performed assessment functions relatively independently. This meant considerable overlap of resources and for some applicants multiple assessments. With the development of assessment practices the independent assessment activities were combined into one and supervised by an assessment committee comprised of representatives from relevant departments. Consequently, formal bureaucratic communication links among departments were created. Different departments could find out what other departments

were doing and coordinate their activities accordingly. Important assessment related problems and issues, such as entry and exit standards, were highlighted through the improved communication among departments. One result is that departments could, through assessment committee meetings, air their collective, and sometimes competing, interests.

An important aspect of assessment practices concerns the collection, distribution, and production of assessment data and knowledge. As the assessment unit developed, sophisticated methods of data collection and analysis were introduced. Assessment knowledge thus became available to the institution for use in various ways such as planning further assessment practices, in accountability procedures for government and the community, for programs aimed at reducing student attrition, and for diagnostic applications by instructors.

Thus, the work of assessment is instrumental in providing the site and venue for collaboration among diverse college departments. The labour of the assessment workers embodied in the "assessment unit" becomes integrated into the overall bureaucratic processes within the college. The assessment practices are "ruling" in the sense that they are a differentiating device for the college to distinguish among candidates for places in college programs. In this sense, the work of assessment is a "ruling" practice.

A significant aspect of assessment work resides in the application, by assessment workers, of the college's bureaucratic authority to legitimate college educational practices to the community. The unique position of the "assessment unit" in the college organization assists these practices.

Ideological Practices

The work of entry-level assessment is unique because of its relation between the college and the community it serves. Assessment workers are often the first contact for people seeking college entry in which people are asked to *do* something (i.e., write a test). The request to write a test brings together, in concrete ways, the applicant's educational goals and the college's ability to meet those goals. That is, it puts into an obvious relation ideologies of accessibility, equality of educational opportunity, and social mobility. Porter argues that "bridges that help the manual worker in his upward mobility are technical and vocational training" (1965: 49); precisely the types of training offered by community colleges.

"Access", "equality", and "social mobility" ideologies are supported by popular notions. As Oakes observes,

providing equal opportunities to develop individual potential has instrumental value to both individuals and society. For individuals, it provides fair access to the world of work by providing fair access to the technical knowledge, the skills, and the attitudes that make possible the production of goods and services. Work is the way to attain the material and nonmaterial resources of society (wealth, prestige, power). For

society, equal educational opportunity means that individuals' talents are developed for the benefit of all (Oakes, 1986: 61).

Government programs, such as "Access For All", reinforce these conceptions with advertisements proclaiming a "new vision for the future of advanced education in B.C." by "providing a highly trained, competitive workforce ready to face the challenge of the 1990s and beyond" (*Victoria Times-Colonist*, 1988). Further support is offered through studies showing the positive association between years of education and levels of income (e.g., Bowles and Gintis, 1976; and Ballantine, 1989). The degree to which ideologies of access, equality, and mobility are accepted by the community is suggested in a small survey of examinees at the college. In the survey, of 102 respondents, 35 (34%) wrote an assessment to "upgrade existing skills to prepare for further education", 30 (29%) wrote to "gain entry into a specific program for re-training", 16 (16%) wrote to "get [their] Grade 12", 10 (10%) wrote for "general or personal knowledge" of their skill levels, 7 (7%) wrote to "entry into a specific course [such as English]", and 4 (4%) wrote to "upgrade skills required in current job". Taken together, the majority of respondents (69%) wrote for work/job-training purposes¹.

Such evidence suggests that people enter community colleges with the expectation that the college will provide the means for them to upgrade and acquire the skills

necessary for jobs, or to transfer to university for further training. However, as pointed out in the introduction to this thesis, "open admissions" is problematic because of the inconsistency between encouraging social mobility through educational training and the realities of limited educational opportunities. One consequence of this problem is described in the *Report of the Provincial Access Committee* (1988a: 12) which reports that, in British Columbia, the institutional capacity to deliver accessible and quality education is "overloaded". Specifically:

Enrollment pressures have resulted in increased workloads for teachers, counsellors and administrators, with apparent reduction in quality of instruction and support services. Maintenance of facilities and equipment has gradually declined over the past few years (1988a: 12).

Part of the work organization of the college is devoted to dealing with the dual problems of "open admissions" and limited resources.

Entry-level assessment is a politically and educationally acceptable tool for controlling educational access. Karen (1990: 227) points out that organizations, in deciding how to distribute scarce resources, will use "some set of criteria (even if random selection is the reigning mechanism for selection) for choosing one individual over another". Community colleges have minimum entrance standards for their courses/programs (e.g., Grade 10 or 12 English with a grade of "C" or higher) that help maintain the quality of programs. Not all people seeking entry into

colleges have the required academic qualifications.

One solution for colleges would be to deny these people admission. However, this solution is too visible; it would make obvious the failure of the college system to accommodate the ideology of accessible educational opportunities. Such disruption of the ruling relation's ideological hegemony may compromise the "spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (Gramsci, 1971: 12). A more hegemonic strategy, one that highlights the creativity of the dominant classes to shape and incorporate the commonsense views, needs and interests of subordinate groups, is for the colleges to offer alternatives. This is where entry-level assessment plays an important role. That role has been described by Karen (1990) as "gate-keeping". In Karen's analysis admission procedures at an elite American university (Harvard) are examined within a "political-organizational" context. Karen's analysis of Harvard's admission procedures reveals their exclusionary function. Even though the theory was developed in the context of admission to an elite American college, the "gate-keeping" model contains insights applicable to this thesis.

The gate-keeping role in entry-level assessment is modified by the "open door" policy of the college. This policy effectively transforms the exclusionary aspects of

"gate-keeping" into a version where the gate becomes more of a conduit allowing entry to all (who wish) but channelling them instead of obstructing.

Entry-level assessment mediates between the ideologies of "accessibility" and "equality of opportunity" and people's educational goals. That is, it may be argued that people seeking to upgrade their educational qualifications do so within ideological conditions that promote education as a means to individual development. The ideology of "access" organizes or orients people's activities by providing "legitimate" goals. The relation between ideology and practice is, in turn, mediated through the "institutional mode".

The "institutional mode" incorporates the popular and commonsense interpretations of accessibility in the active application of their entry policies. The college's admission policies are actively applied by assessment workers. Assessment workers are often the first to "acquaint" people with the "realities" of educational access and, therefore, are most likely to be the first to feel the brunt of people's unmet expectations.

In the process of determining examinee skill levels, entry-level assessment begins a reorienting process whereby people's expectations of their educational goals are brought into line with their "skill levels". For some, "skill levels" and educational goals coincide while for others a

large gap exists. There are standard operating procedures in place to deal with "skill-goal" gaps. Procedures include offering examinees alternatives, such as substituting educational goals, and citing "objective" documents that serve as the basis for placement (selection). The effect of the bureaucratic procedures is to limit individual gatekeepers' discretion in making placement decisions while containing examinee behaviour within institutionally defined rational and legitimate outcomes. The bureaucratic organization of the college effectively structures processes in which examinees' failure (to achieve their educational goals) is redefined by the college. Examinees are thus "cooled out"²; the "effect, at the best, is to let down hopes gently and unexplosively" (Clark, 1960: 574). Nobody "fails" the entry-level assessment; examinees are "placed" in courses appropriate to their skill levels.

The reorienting process begins in the introduction to each assessment session. It will be recalled that the introduction structured for examinees the college's qualified definition of "open admission". Assessment workers also stress the benefits of assessment for *both* examinees and the college. One feature of the introduction is that it prepares examinees for the *possibility* of relinquishing their original educational goal and substituting it for another. The possibility of changing educational goals then sets the stage for introducing the

range of alternatives offered by the college. Alternatives may take several forms: substitute goals, remedial courses, and concessions made by assessment workers (e.g., re-writes, counselling interviews, or sponsored placements).

Goal substitution is offered under two conditions: the examinee fails to achieve the test scores high enough to enter the program of choice, or the test score is above the program entry threshold but the program of choice is full. In the first condition, substitution "reflects less unfavorably on personal capacity than does leaving the scene" (Clark, 1960: 575). The second condition is an informal method of re-directing people to courses with space. For example, examinees may write the entry test for Nursing. During my tenure at the assessment unit there was a two-year waiting list for the Nursing program. Examinees were informed of alternatives in the health care field they may wish to consider, such as Long Term Care Assistant (which has lower entrance standards and takes less time than a Nursing diploma)³. Thus, even for those examinees who score above the entry thresholds, substituting Long Term Care Assistant for Nursing does appear to be a practical alternative that enables them to work in the health care system (similar to Nursing) albeit at lower pay rates and, arguably, lower status in the health care professional hierarchy. At one level, substituting goals allows examinees to re-interpret their assessment efforts in terms

appropriate to their talents or abilities thereby reinforcing the notion of individual effort. At another level it is a method for the college to fill empty seats in programs and thus secure government funding and to defer enrollment in popular programs (and limit the size of waiting lists) until changes can be made (e.g., add more classes, hire more instructors). Thus, goal substitution represents an ideological practice connected to the state's "fiscal crisis" and its resulting austerity practices. It legitimates those practices by defining examinees' options only within existing arrangements, rather than developing authentic alternatives such as more positions within the Nursing Program.

For the "unsuccessful" examinee, other alternatives take the form of remedial courses⁴. The remedial courses offer a variety of services that range from Basic Adult Literacy to Grade 11. The remedial courses are a form of "subcollege". The college itself makes this distinction between remedial courses (such as those provided by the Adult Special and Basic Education, and English as a Second Language Departments) which are "pre-college" courses and "college" courses (i.e., courses with a prerequisite of Grade 12 English). This distinction is more than nominal. In pre-college courses there are no credits given. Students taking remedial courses cannot, therefore, transfer credits to college courses they desire. Furthermore, pre-college

courses do not qualify students for provincial financial aid which requires at least nine credits. The significance of the "subcollege" classification is that people sharing similar characteristics (e.g., an ABE placement) are grouped together in an institutional unit separate from the college mainstream. This isolation facilitates the creation and implementation of general (and generalizing) bureaucratic procedures to deal with the individual needs of ABE (or ESL or ASE, etc.) students. The subcollege is the institutional expression of social relations that transform the actual, the concrete, and the particular "into the categories whereby they are rendered actionable within bureaucratic, professional, or managerial modes" (Smith, 1987: 158).

Placement into remedial courses creates a "special" category of people (e.g., adult learners, disabled, minority groups and women) deserving of "special" attention by the college. People in "special" programs gain a kind of "institutional recognition" that, as Karen (1990: 235) argues, reflects the "struggles at both societal and the institutional levels" in which "racial/ethnic categories [become] legitimate and important means of distributing scarce resources" (1990: 235). The provincial government has targeted certain groups for attention. For example, the "Access For All" program emphasis included "\$1 million dollars to *literacy training and special financial assistance* for many more *literacy and adult basic education*

students in 1989/90 . . . a task force on *Native education* . . . \$1 million for advanced education for the *disabled* [emphasis added]" (*Victoria Times-Colonist*, April 24, 1988). The Provincial Access Committee (1988a: iv) reflects the government's emphasis in its "priority concerns" focusing on "under-represented groups", viz., "people in small remote communities", "Native Indians", the "disabled", and "prison population". Thus, groups, defined by the government, such as "disabled", "Native Indians", and "adult literacy and basic education" are eligible for "special financial assistance" and training from the government. The college, for its part, is able to secure funding under programs such as "Access For All" to increase its overall budget while, at the same time, providing access to remedial education, which legitimates one educational function and government goal.

The existence of a "subcollege" has important implications for the organization of consent within the larger institution. Karen (1990) points out that the categories of "special" groups indicates the extent to which they are influential in the organization's structure. That is, the "more embedded is the influence of a given group in the organization's structure, the less visible are the categories that advantage it" (Karen, 1990: 235).

Thus, categories associated with academic merit, for example, are seen as 'normal' categories (natural, neutral, or universalistic) to which institutions of higher education attend; racial/ethnic categories are seen as 'special' (Karen, 1990: 235).

The extent to which groups are "special" and require attention or the extent to which groups are "normal" imbues the assessment process with class relations. That is, categorizing examinees as "ABE", "university transfer", or "trades preparation", corresponds to distinctions in people's relationship to the mode of production (i.e., "working-class", "middle-class"). The correspondence argument depends on the extent to which college educational practices select certain groups to particular academic tracks and the relation of those academic tracks to the segmentation of the labour force.

Class-relations (i.e., defined in relation to labour force) are created and re-created in the daily activities of people. Class-relations, however, are not visible in those daily activities. Smith (1987: 80) points out that the "actual practices and the material conditions that form, organize, and provide for the 'appearance' of direct action are not visible. Their activities, their work, their consciousness appear simple, complete, their relations undetermined . . .". Thus, placement into remedial courses "appears" to be a complete and simple form of direct action by the college organization to assist its community clientele.

People are organized into homogeneous groups and then given special attention, e.g., financially and educationally. Hidden within the context of remedial education is a

particular form of social organization in which dominant groups are able to establish specific cultural content that defines what it is to be "special" or "meritorious"; use of such categories is differentially consequential for different social groups (Bourdieu, 1984).

One consequence is that the creation of "special" groups mediates between societal and institutional "struggles". Bourdieu argues that:

[A] group's presence in the official classification depends on its capacity to get itself recognized, to get itself noticed and admitted, and so to win a place in the social order (Bourdieu, 1984: 480-481).

Indeed, one basis for Smith proposing "institutional ethnography" as a research strategy is an attempt to create the conditions within which women's "voices" are recognized:

[women have] been living in an intellectual, cultural, and political world, from whose making we have been almost entirely excluded and in which we are recognized as no more than marginal voices" (Smith, 1987: 1).

It should be noted, however, that gaining recognition as a "special" group does not necessarily mean that advantages will follow. It does mean, however, that institutional workers will attend to examinees from "special" categories and future institutional plans, activities, and practices will take into account the "special" categories.

Other alternatives offered to examinees are based on assessment workers interventions to deal with the "special" individual cases. These may take the form of authorizing

re-writes (in whole or part), counselling interviews, and sponsored placements. These alternatives are integrated into the standard operating procedures of the assessment unit (described in Chapter Three). The interventions are a form of operating procedures that bypasses other standard procedures. That is, interventions are concessions made to individual examinees in light of "extenuating circumstances" for each individual case. They allow the "human touch" (i.e., the personal, the subjective, and the particular) to be part of the placement process in conjunction with the "objective" and mechanical "routine" placements generated by the computer and the assessment bureaucracy. They imply an "openness" within the limits set by the entrance thresholds and a recognition of the "particular" within the "universalist" ideology of the "open-door" policy. Nevertheless, the agency of the intervener is bounded by the formal and informal limits set by the college's entrance standards.

The standard operating procedures define the placement categories, describe the conditions constituting a "special" case, and mandate the institutionally appropriate action(s) to follow. The more a "special" case requires more independent and creative interpretations of the standard operating procedures, the more likely the placement decision will be made at senior levels in the assessment unit's bureaucratic hierarchy.

In the assessment unit the most "routine" cases were processed by the clerk (or by students). The clerk used the categories operative in the computer program to determine the "correct" placement. The clerk verified only that the most obvious components of the placement were present (e.g., all the necessary scores were present). At this level decision-making involved only the clerical aspects of people-processing and was, therefore, conducted by those in the least powerful position (i.e., clerks and students).

At the next level of decision-making the assessment advisor would verify that the computer program correctly placed test scores into the appropriate categories and checked the test circumstances for "special" cases. That is, the summary sheet of composite scores was reviewed to determine score consistency between test sub-sections. For instance, high or low scores in one subsection (e.g., reading comprehension) would indicate conditions requiring attention (e.g., the examinee incorrectly marked the answer sheet). "Special" cases, or unusual patterns, were referred to the assessment adjudicator. At this level, decision-making was less bound by the rote placement. There was limited choice in deciding who or what constituted a "special" case. The advisor had greater decision-making capacity than the clerk.

The adjudicator (instructor attached to the unit) was the next level of arbitration for the placements. The

adjudicator authorized re-writes, conducted interviews, and was responsible, overall, for the accuracy of the placement decisions. At this level, the decision-making range was the widest and the most subjective. The most subjective placement decisions were "sponsored" placements. The adjudicator would decide which examinees had the "desired" attributes (e.g., motivation to learn) and "sponsor" the examinee into a placement. The sponsorship was based on the examinee's test scores, usually an interview with the person, and the adjudicator's past experience, as a faculty member (educator), and her past experiences with previously sponsored examinees. The accuracy of sponsored placements (i.e., the success of the sponsored student in the course) was guided and controlled by formal (such as official complaints) and informal (such as personal communications) mechanisms. The work organization of the college organized the relations sufficiently well as to guard against consistent misperceptions and mis-placements by the assessment adjudicator.

The highest and final level of decision-making was at the most senior position, viz., department manager. Significantly, the manager's decisions were bound as much by the standard procedures as those at the clerk level. That is, the manager was involved only as the "court of last resort"; the examinee having exhausted the formal and informal placement procedures. At this level, the decision

was to deny or accept a certain placement. The manager, in fact, epitomizes the organizational interests of the college. Karen (1990: 236) argues that an "institution, in performing its gatekeeping function, must ensure that only those selectors with the most global view of the process can reject candidates from "special" categories".

Thus, as it reaches this level an examinee's placement result has progressively moved from the mechanical, "impartial" and objectifying placement of the computer, through the more subjective counselling by the advisor and adjudicator but back to a more mechanical and impartial form. Karen (1990: 236) observes that senior positions within the organization are the "embodiment of the institution's perception of its interests. Though they [managers] may personally be more class- or merit oriented,⁵ as institutional managers, they will act to enhance the visibility, resources, autonomy, and general good fortune of the selection office". Managers tend to make decisions that are the "best" for the institution, i.e., that are consistent with organizational interests.

The consistency and accuracy of placement decisions are guided, controlled, and limited by the standard procedures as decisions made at one level are checked by other levels in the assessment bureaucracy. Furthermore, external to the assessment bureaucracy the formal procedures for "official" complaints by instructors and administrators as well as the

informal networks existing among college workers constitute another form of quality control.

The standard bureaucratic procedures, on the surface, appear to ensure that all examinees are treated "fairly" in an "impartial" manner where decisions at all levels are made on the basis of universal criterion of "ability" and "merit". But within these procedures are avenues for human agency to mediate the impartial, neutral bureaucracy with particular, individual, and subjective actions and decisions. Human agency is, however, bound by the bureaucratic procedures to yield institutionally appropriate decisions. The procedures ensure that examinees are given several opportunities to demonstrate their skill levels and there is an "objective" basis for placement decisions.

Structured within the standard procedures are elements of individualism. That is, the onus is on the individual to give cause why he or she should be placed at a certain level. If, after given the concession(s) the examinee fails to place at a higher level then responsibility rests with the individual's goals, motives, abilities, etc. The college, having provided the opportunity, is absolved from any further responsibility. At one level the standard procedures acknowledge the notions of "universalism" and "merit" that support the ideologies of "access", "equality", and "mobility" but at another level the standard procedures legitimate class inequalities by representing individual

effort as the primary factor in student success: a case of institutionally "blaming the victim". The emphasis on "individual" effort tends to contradict inequalities (such as "screening" into "groups") structured into the assessment process. As argued in Chapter One, the "correspondence" between academic tracks (i.e., "academic" and "vocational") that reflect and reproduce class divisions (e.g., "working-class") shifts the focus from an individual level to the "structural dynamics of the dominant society" (Giroux, 1980: 226).

Alternatives offered by the college to the examinees are reinterpreted through the assessment process to appeal widely. The alternatives are mechanisms that promote the achievement of educational goals through access to a full range of educational opportunities. The standard procedures help detach the college and its workers from the emotional aspects of assessment work and thus circumscribe the emotional outcome of assessment (i.e., conspicuous expressions of joy, anger, disappointment) at an impersonal level. Thus, the personal and subjective experiences and emotions that are a part of assessment work (for both examinees and workers) are transformed from the subjective level to the impersonal level of bureaucratic rules and regulations that objectify and organize relations into institutionally appropriate modes of behaviours.

Interventions by assessment workers are the most obviously ideological practice in the assessment process. Their actions in interpreting the standard operating procedures mediate between the examinees' test writing activities and the college's bureaucratic organization. Smith (1987) observes that the "coordination of institutional processes is mediated ideologically" (1987: 161). Ideology provides the categories and concepts "expressing the relation of local courses of action to the institutional function" (ibid.: 160). The procedures, described above, that govern the mechanisms articulate the local action of the assessment worker to the institutional function and turn workers' actions, words, etc. into "ideology - the work or ruling.

New workers are formally taught about the placement categories by learning how to apply the categories to particular cases, which entails a comprehension of the limits of acceptability. Informally, they learn about the implicit associations between placement level, educational goals and "probability of success". The implicit associations are institutionally appropriate concepts that workers may use in analyzing their experiences in the context of the larger work processes. That is, these ideological concepts encourage and facilitate a translation of examinees' actual, concrete activities into the hegemonic discourse of the college. For example, during the

assessment process there is a shift in emphasis from examinees' goals to the test result. The production of "objective" test scores shifts and re-defines examinees' goals into test scores and their corresponding placement levels. Thus, workers are able to point to the (implied) association between test results, placement level, and "probability of success" as criteria for rationalizing a placement decision. The examinee "needs" to be at a certain level because the test scores demonstrate the "need". The examinees' goals are effectively transformed into institutionally appropriate actions to deal with their new "needs". One major consequence of ideologically mediated concepts is the abstraction of humans from their activity.

The ideological work process highlights aspects of the assessment process while ignoring others. For example, college studies on student failure rates (called "attrition rates") shift the focus from negative connotations of "failure" to more positive ones imbued in "retention". By analyzing and reporting "retention rates" rather than "attrition rates" student failures may be re-defined in positive and institutionally accommodating ways. For instance, according to one unpublished document, the Adult Basic Education Department, from September, 1987 to April 1988 had a "retention" rate of 59.5%, which alternatively, means that 40.5% of ABE students dropped out (or "attrition" rate) during the year⁶. Similarly, student grade point

averages are re-interpreted into "productive" grades (i.e., grades that allow students to progress to the next higher level - "C" or higher). Using ABE as an illustration, the "productive" grade rate in the same time period was 35% which translates into an "unproductive" grade rate of 65%. This means that 65% of the ABE students, from September 1987 to April 1988, did not achieve a "C" or higher⁷. The same document does, however, highlight "university transfer" , and "career/technical" data in which overall college performance is relatively high (44% retention and 70% retention, respectively).

Implied in the above example is the organizing nature of documents. Documents are objective forms of knowledge that are the "primary mode of action and decision", which coordinate the "acts, decisions, policies and plans of large-scale organizations" (Smith, 1990: 61). The production of college information forms the knowledge base for college practices and informs its plans, applications for fiscal support, and accountability to the government and community.

Documentation of college activities generalizes individual relations and "local experience" into relations beyond individual control. In the production of assessment documents, individuals are progressively transformed into more abstract and abstracted forms. That is, at the beginning there are competent people engaging in a concrete

activity (test writing). As more information is created (in the form of test scores) the focus shifts from people to test scores. Test scores are combined and manipulated statistically to yield placement decisions. Those placement decisions, in their turn, are statistically transformed into monthly management reports describing the assessment activities for the month.

The monthly management reports represent "objectified" assessment practice. That is, the actual test-writing activities of examinees are purified, transformed, and abstracted into volumes of placement categories with a statistical association and probability for "success". This objectified knowledge is then reciprocally transformed into management plans and procedures which are then given their practical expression by the actions of the assessment workers. Invisible in this circular documentary process are examinees' and assessment workers' labour - the activities required to conduct, interpret, and produce the assessment documents. The process tends to abstract labour at all levels by rendering invisible certain forms while highlighting others.

In summary, the work organization of the college is embedded in the relations of ruling that reproduce class, in part, through the educational process. Class reproduction is structured in the college's bureaucratic hierarchy as it acknowledges and supports the popular ideologies of

"access", "equality" and "mobility". In the application of the college's admission policies there are structured inequalities that segregate people into categories for "special" attention. The actions of the assessment workers, in the main, are contradictory practices which provide services that rationalize placement decisions, supposedly based on "individual" effort. The ideological work of assessment establishes to examinees and the community the validity of assessments and the educational practices of the college. Within the structure of the bureaucracy there are avenues for human agency to resist and confront bureaucratic control. The choices for resistance are, however, circumscribed by the very same bureaucratic rules that allow institutionally appropriate behaviour. The social relations of the work organization of the college abstract people's actual local experiences into generalized forms. Assessment workers, themselves subject to the abstraction process, assist in the creation and distribution of assessment knowledge that contributes to the overall generalizing functions of institutional relations.

The ideological force of assessment as a college entrance procedure obscures from examinees its ruling character. While entry-level assessment may be annoying, or resented by examinees because it is hard or stands between examinees and their goals, it is organized to individualize "success". It makes failure an examinee's problem and "bad"

(from examinees' view) placements a reasonable, if not appreciated result. In addition, assessment workers draw upon the ideologies of access, equality and mobility in mediating between the community and the college, thereby legitimating college practices.

At another level, the work organization of the college is informed by sources external to it. These sources are the professional discourses, which constitute further support for college educational practices.

Notes

1. Unpublished document, February 24, 1989.
2. Clark credits Erving Goffman as the originator of the cooling-out conception (Clark, 1960: 569). Further, Pinus notes that the term "cooling-out", originating with Erving Goffman, refers to a process "where a swindler gets his mark (i.e., the person who has been swindled) to accept his fate and not to complain to the authorities" (Pincus, 1978: 176).
3. The Nursing program is two years in duration. With additional time on the waiting list examinees could expect to wait 4-5 years to become Registered Nurses. This time lag is a significant informal qualifier for potential Nursing students and only the most persistent succeed.
4. Successful completion of the remedial courses allows students to progress to the next level (which may include program entry) without re-writing the assessment. However, some programs require an entry-level assessment regardless of upgrading courses.
5. Karen's observation that work-related decisions may contradict personal orientations illustrates the objective (i.e., independent of individual choice or will) nature of the ruling relations.
6. Unpublished document, August 1988.
7. Findings such as these consistently demonstrate problems the ABE department has had in recruiting and retaining students. One assessment unit study showed that during a one month period, of 229 examinees placed in ABE courses, 85% had not registered after 3 months (Unpublished document, February, 16, 1989). Failure to register is an instance of "resistance".

CHAPTER SIX**PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE**

Thus far, the analysis has focused on relations within the college itself. The college's assessment practices are components of the "institutional modes" that coordinate, guide, and translate the activities of the educational institutions into the "relations of ruling". Assessing work is supported, in part, by professional discourses to which educators and assessment experts appeal in making sense of educational testing. Discourse organizes the relations among participants through the medium of their work (Hodge, 1979: 173; Kress, 1985; Smith, 1987). The analysis in this chapter "suggests", rather than explicates, the way that professional discourses organize assessment work. That is, this chapter provides an account of the social relations of assessment work as a differentiating device for the college and it *suggests* how such differentiation is organized as a more generalized ruling practice.

To be recognized as a participating and competent member of an organization, one must be able to produce work in the appropriate form of style and terminology that is recognizable in the organization. Assessment work, in part, consists of producing documents (e.g., reports and studies) detailing assessment knowledge, using the same general concepts as those used by other college workers (including management). These institutional ideologies provide the

connecting links among different work activities in the college. Assessment workers are kept up-to-date on "advances" in assessment techniques, methods, and issues through seminars and conferences organized by the college, thus connecting the ideological processes of professional discourse as a constituent of the college's assessment practices. Discourses, expressed through texts, are the medium of knowledge that is the property of organizations rather than individuals (Smith, 1987: 212). In this manner professional discourse regulates the topics, themes, problems, and conceptual practices considered legitimate and relevant to assessment work.

Sociological attention to discourse emphasizes the social consequences of discourses and in particular their ability to close off possibilities (Smith, 1987; Giroux, 1988). That is, within a discourse there are some things which cannot be said or thought. Abercrombie, et al. (1988: 171) point out that "discourses have the effect similar to that of ideology. That is, a discourse, as a ready-made way of thinking, can rule out alternative ways of thinking and hence preserve a particular distribution of power". Thus, discourses, as socially organized practices, are

embedded in and organize relations among subjects active in the discourse. . . The institutional forms of discourse create relations between subjects appearing as a body of knowledge existing in its own right. These externalized forms of consciousness are specific forms of social relations, accomplished in determinate socially organized practices (Smith, 1987: 214).

For Gramsci, the actual work necessary for the ruling class to rule is performed for it by its "functionaries" - organic intellectuals. The work of intellectuals is mediated by the "whole fabric of society" and the "complex of superstructures" (Gramsci, 1971: 12). The intellectuals are the dominant group's "'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government" (ibid.). Organizing social hegemony and "state domination" creates a particular division of labour in which "there is no apparent attribution of directive or organisational function" (Gramsci, 1971: 13). The product of intellectuals' labour (discourse), thus appears independent of the "relations of ruling". The ensuing analysis, however, suggests a singular agreement - a working consensus - among different sites of discourse.

The professional discourses examined in this chapter include corporate (business), government, and education. The discourses of business contribute to those in government which, in turn, structure educational plans and objectives for education professionals. This is not to suggest that a linear correspondence exists among the discourses. It does, however, suggest an obvious consistency in themes, issues, and recognized problems among business, government, and educational discourses. It will be argued that, overall, the discourses tend to reveal a rather narrow view of human development and potential. This chapter examines the

concrete ways in which professional discourse organizes and structures educational practices that secure the public's "spontaneous consent" for such practices.

Business Discourse

An important site of professional discourse is business. Given the nature of capitalist relations of production the influence of corporate interests in education is not surprising. At issue is the effect corporate interests have on educational practices. That is, the interests of capital tend to have priority over other (e.g., pedagogical) interests in education. Business interests dominate the practices of the state including government educational policies (see O'Connor, 1974; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Therborn, 1978; and Bowles and Edwards, 1985). The economic priorities of business help structure and organize the social relations within government and education.

From time to time business interests are expressed more explicitly and in obvious relation to education policies and practices. One such example is in a discussion paper by Forget (1985) outlining four "urgent issues" for Canadian education policies. The issues highlighted are: the need to balance public funding between university and secondary education; the need for a balance between public and private funding for education; the need to improve the quality of education; and the need to harmonize federal-provincial educational policies and funding procedures. In the current

context of capitalist globalization these "urgent issues" are intended to inspire changes necessary in the education system for Canada to "adapt quickly" to changing "international economic conditions". Specifically, Forget (1985: 1) notes that education is critical to "Canada's economic future"; specifically, "[t]raining and retraining programs are vital to the adjustments that must be made to rapidly changing international economic conditions".

Forget argues that to be "competitive" Canada's education system requires re-structuring in four ways. First, he urges increasing the level of literacy in the general population. This proposal is based on the notion that widely accessible education has produced an over-abundance of highly trained people such that the 'social rate of return' for education investment has decreased (i.e., there is an over-supply of highly educated workers). To offset the high proportion of educated people in the population, Forget (1985: 2) recommends an "educational threshold that could determine literacy retention after one has left school". Forget's idea of literacy, however, is narrowly defined in terms of "functional literacy", viz,:

the ability to read and comprehend moderately difficult texts- such as instructions, safety warnings, and technical manuals-of the kind one needs to understand in order to function in our technological society as a consumer or low-skill worker, and **numeracy**, the ability to do simple arithmetic (Forget, 1985: 2).

Thus, the "urgency" for increasing the literacy level of the population is limited to literacy levels consistent with the

skills determined by the practices of capitalist business. That is, competitiveness in an international economy is associated by Forget with minimal reading skills necessary to perform low-skill, task-oriented jobs, such as following instructions and reading technical manuals. Ehringhaus (1990: 195), however, points out that "functional literacy", as implied by Forget, depends on a "simplistic concept" as an "internally held trait defined and possessed by only certain segments of our population". Forget's call for increasing the literacy in the population to functional levels implies a "survival" level of education. Forget's proposal does not suggest any need for a population that thinks critically or clearly, only one that can read and count well enough to be a "consumer or low-skill worker".

Second, Forget calls for a shift away from public to private funding through scholarship programs. Public funding of education contributes to social inequality because people from "family backgrounds with above-median incomes make disproportionate use of subsidized educational services" (Forget, 1985: 3). Thus, instead of reducing "differences among social classes" through equal access, subsidized education, in Forget's words, "is more likely to act as a reinforcer of other sources of social inequality than the converse" (ibid.). Access, it appears to Forget, is related more to income than "ability". To ameliorate the inequalities associated with "access" Forget recommends

shifting the "balance between public and private funding" more toward the "private" side. A "better" way to spend public funds is to award "deserving" students scholarships based on "ability" because there is, according to Forget (1985: 4), a "correlation between ability and higher education returns"¹.

Third, Forget holds that the development of higher quality education consists of two sides: a "demand" side and a "supply" side. One method of enhancing quality on the "supply" side is to open access to university faculty positions by "phasing-out" tenured professors and replacing them with "positions created for specified periods rather than permanent" (Forget, 1985: 5). The new positions would be an inducement for attracting "quality" graduate students into masters and doctorate programs which are an "essential ingredient in any university's 'search for excellence'" (Forget, 1985: 4).

Another method for enhancing quality education is to emphasize the "allocation of resources which enhance quality and hence the effectiveness of higher education in Canada" (1985: 5). Forget urges that the goal of quality may be realized by allowing admissions officers at Canadian educational institutions to "apply more rigorous criteria of excellence" and by "creation of a national institute" devoted to providing provinces (on a voluntary basis) "systematic and comparable evaluations of performance"

(Forget, 1985: 6).

Fourth, Forget argues for "harmonization" of federal-provincial education funding and policies because "[i]nvestment in human capital represents a very large share of national investment" (Forget, 1985:6). The federal and provincial governments need to cooperate and "move together to achieve some common goals" (ibid.). Harmonization plays an important role in "facilitating public-sector adjustment to the realities of tomorrow" (Forget, 1985: 7). The "adjustments" Forget urges will promote (1) privatization of education in which "quality" and "excellence" (for some groups) are emphasized, and (2) standardized literacy levels for the general population set at functional (or "survival") levels.

Thus, Forget not only defines the issues relevant to education policy in Canada, but labels those issues as "urgent" requiring, or compelling, swift action. The actions proposed by Forget such as an "educational threshold" for "functional literacy and numeracy", a shift toward private funding of education through awarding scholarships based on "ability", and replacing tenured positions at university with short-term contracts reflect a conservative agenda to re-structure the state and re-organize education practices in favour of control by corporate capital (Fisher and Gilgoff, 1987). In practice, the changes proposed by Forget would enhance social

inequality by exacerbating a two-tier education system (i.e., university elite and vocational training) consistent with what Gramsci termed a "rational formula: vocational school for the instrumental classes, and the classical school for the dominant classes and intellectuals" (Gramsci, 1971: 26).

Structuring the debate on education policy, as Forget has done, illustrates the ability of discourses to "close off possibilities". This is accomplished by highlighting some issues while ignoring others. In doing so it constitutes an important ideological practice. For example, the issue of functional literacy also marginalizes another important issue, that of teaching "critical thinking". Critical thinking subsumes functional levels of literacy but also entails "rational analysis and independence of thought" (D'Hollander, et al., 1988: 23). Critical thinking, Albert (1989: 10) argues, is really a form of "logical self-defense or how to become a good consumer of ideas and arguments". Logical self-defense includes the ability to dissect arguments, propositions, and statements into their constituent parts and to trace their origins, evaluate the evidence presented to support them, and determine what is reasonable to believe (ibid.: 11). These skills are consistent with dialectical logic which unifies thinking and practical activity. An emphasis on critical or dialectical thinking would, conceivably, yield a "real" increase in

literacy levels in the population consistent with Forget's recommendation, without resorting to objectifying "educational thresholds". The basic questions and implied assumptions that guide Forget's analysis tend to support a conservative set of alternatives for action, and those alternatives support the imperatives of capitalist production and exchange, to the exclusion of other imperatives and priorities.

A further illustration of how business discourse intersects with educational practice is found in West's (1988) economic analysis of higher education in Canada². While West does not explicate issues of "policy", as in Forget's discussion, recommendations, based on his analysis, are outlined to "re-structure" education policies in Canada.

The impetus for West's analysis is to provide a "description and analysis of post-secondary education in Canada today" which replaces references to "international economic conditions" (articulated by Forget) with a more neutral phrase. The goal of West's study is to "generate reliable information relevant to a number of policy issues" (1988: 1). Although economic conditions are not directly brought in as the basis for the analysis, the issues West examines are directly related to economic production. They include "productivity", "rates of return", and "optimal investment" options.

Education is analyzed by West within the "economics of the service sector in Canada"³. It is significant that although West notes that education is "in the public sector of economic activity" (1988: 1), he analyzes it "as if" it were a "service industry" and compares it to other industries, such as manufacturing, in the "service-sector". West makes reference to the technical difficulties comparing education to manufacturing when he observes that "no perfect analogy between universities and manufacturing industries comes out very clearly when attempting to measure and compare productivities" (1988: 3). By categorizing education in the "service-sector" West presents an interesting view of the relationship between education and other "service industries". Education, it would appear by implication, provides "services" to other industries such as "primary resource" and "manufacturing" by producing the "human capital" necessary to realize profits. This type of conceptualizing involves a reification of concrete practice into abstracted categories which then serve as the basis for analysis to "generate reliable information" and make policy recommendations. Consequently, the policy recommendations, it may be argued, given their abstract and abstracted basis are equally abstract and abstracted from actual practice.

Education is thus defined by West as a "single industry producing higher education" (1988: 35). Educational "productivity" when compared to other service sector

industries, such as manufacturing, is "unimpressive". For example, over a ten year period university productivity (as measured by degrees granted) has increased 2% while manufacturing productivity has, over the same period, increased *annually* by 1.2%. One factor in education's apparent "inefficiency" is due to the failure of post-secondary institutions to "economize on the single most important cost, the value of student time (measured by student earnings foregone to attend school)" (1988: 48). Education's comparatively low productivity levels are, according to West, serious problems that need to be rectified.

West's analysis emphasizes "quantifiable" issues associated with the allocation of resources to higher education. The quantitative analysis discloses that unemployment and education are negatively associated, labour-force participation rates and educational levels are positively associated, and "slightly more Canadians (per thousand of population) obtain post-secondary schooling than do Americans" (West, 1988: xi).

The emphasis on quantity, however, ignores other issues. For example, West's analysis reveals that "adjusted" educational productivity (i.e., when different degrees are weighted to reflect their respective economic value) has increased despite "complaints of underfunding". The qualitative differences between degrees (such as those

between engineering and sociology) become a ratio between adjusted inputs and outputs. The benefits of education, in turn, are viewed as "rates of return"; specifically, the social rate of return for education is captured in the phrase "the welfare costs of public funds" which, upon analysis, show the "net monetary returns from education have to be adjusted downward quite substantially when the costs of public funds are included" (1988: 5).

West's emphasis on quantitative issues does not, however, inhibit him from calling for qualitative changes to educational practices. West argues that "achieving optimal levels of total educational expenditure and obtaining the most efficient use of each dollar spent" is possible through "more competition" (1988: 111). According to West, government policies to encourage competition should include the "raising of student fees (which is justified in any case on the grounds of equity), the deregulation of provincial tuition structures and the channelling of federal funds directly to students in the form of grants spendable exclusively (i.e., vouchers) on higher education" (1988: 111-112).

Furthermore, West proposes the creation of "centres of excellence" to enhance "changes in student achievement from the beginning to end of an educational course" (1988: 110). One means of accomplishing this is to use "centrally assessed examinations" (ibid.). Centres of excellence

would, according to West, also attract international students and teachers which would increase the "value-added" aspects of education. However, West warns that "centres of excellence" may raise more problems concerning the value of "international trade in education", but, "useful economic analysis, however, awaits significant improvements in data" (1988: 115).

Although West's analysis is more complex and sophisticated than Forget's discussion, the results are consistent. In West's analysis the options presented as desired alternatives would result in a re-structured state reflecting a neo-conservative enhancement of corporate control.

Discussion papers and analyses, such as those described above, are specialized documents coordinating internal and external institutional relations (Smith and Smith, 1990: 173-174). The business discourse orients the themes, relevancies, problems, and practices appropriate to education mediated by government. For example, Mellos (1980) points out themes common to the corporation and the state that include "norms of cooperation", and the "state and the market". "Cooperation" between corporations and the state, Mellos (1980: 121) argues, underlies state "concessions to monopoly capital for the exploitation of minerals and other natural resources". Mellos also suggests that the notion of "balance", which is part of Forget's

discussion, e.g., the 'balance between public and private funding", confirms that the "market" operates as a "regulator of wealth" (Mellos, 1980: 122). A "balanced economy" thus represents a "healthy relationship between the economy and state" (Mellos, 1980: 123).

The themes common in business discourses result in common conclusions and common policies to resolve the problems. The B.C. experience, as Donaldson and Rosenbluth point out, has been that such policies tend not to

serve the people of British Columbia well. They are defective largely because of mistaken preconceptions regarding the B.C. economy, inattention to economic facts, and errors in economic analysis and because of values that focus policy decisions on a privileged minority of the population (Donaldson and Rosenbluth, 1986: 316).

The themes and issues in business discourse are further elaborated by the professional discourse of government.

Government Discourse

Government discourse provides the enabling conditions through which business interests find their practical expression in educational practices. That is, government discourse structures the themes and issues expressed in business discourse into its plans, missions, goals, and objectives which education professionals then transform into practical activities (e.g., curriculum). There is a mirror-like correspondence by which business interests are reflected in government educational discourse.

The Mission, Goals, and Objectives: 1986-1991 (1986) presents a five-year plan for the college and institute system in British Columbia. The document outlines seven goals: accessibility, comprehensiveness, quality, occupational and economic development, social development, use of resources, and accountability⁴. This document reflects, in obvious terms, the economic priorities expressed by business. For example, the goal of "comprehensiveness" calls for colleges to develop a variety of programs to meet individual needs and the "societal need for an educated and well-trained population" (1986: 5). "Well-trained" suggests two connotations: a labour-force trained in the skills required in the workplace and/or a disciplined work-force that is compliant to the interests of capital. The goal of "occupational and economic development" specifically links labour and the imperatives of production as it calls for the post-secondary system to "actively contribute its expertise and resources to the provincial goal of economic development" (1986: 9).

Colleges may participate in two ways: in cooperation with "other local or provincial agencies, associations, or employers" in strategies for local economic development or renewal or by "aiding in the development of export markets for B.C.'s goods and services through participation in international programs" (ibid.). In response to government's stated goal of "occupational and economic

development", several colleges have aggressively sought new connections with the Pacific Rim countries (especially, Japan and Hong Kong) to attract new international students. Several colleges have "sister" colleges in Japan with regular exchanges for students, faculty, and administrators.

The Japanese system is widely favoured as a model for successfully improving "cost-efficiency" and "productivity". However, Ueda (1990: 199) maintains that the Japanese "learning corporation" controls and manages the "whole system of vocational and educational training, so that through vocational training workers are directed to facilitate the needs of capital". Ueda concludes that the "learning corporation is a managerial process uniting government and corporations in the organization of the job-educational nexus" (Ueda, 1990: 210). It would appear that the basis for applying the Japanese model to British Columbia colleges may be the common interests of business in Japan and British Columbia to train workers to "facilitate the needs of capital".

Another relatively recent example of business-oriented discourse is found in the Report of the Royal Commission on Education (Province of British Columbia, 1988b) which examines B.C. education from kindergarten through Grade 12 (K-12). Throughout the document business interests are expressed in various forms which are then translated into recommendations. The Royal Commission is presented, in

part, as a response to exigencies of economic production.

The "terms of reference" for the Commission state:

British Columbia today faces unprecedented challenges as the result of fundamental *economic and technological change*. The government has concluded, therefore, that it is timely to clearly evaluate where we are going in education and to select the most appropriate and *cost-effective means* of meeting our objectives [emphasis added] (1988b: 3).

It is important to note that the goal of the Commission is to "inquire into and . . . report" on the nature of education in B.C. The Report emphasizes that its mandate does not include "ambitious plans for 'school reform'", nor does it seek to "ascribe measures of culpability for educational failure" (1988b: 12). Rather, the emphasis of the Commission is "information":

. . . in both general and specific ways, this Commission wishes to *inform* British Columbians and their government about the complex undertaking that is modern schooling, as well as the *choices and options* that must be considered if we wish to develop educational policies that are responsive to our current and emerging social circumstances and values [emphasis added] (1988b: 12-13).

Thus, the Commission's aim is not so much to change the education system but to study and re-organize education (K-12) through the most "cost-effective means".

Re-organization is to be conducted through a "school mandate" that serves to clarify the "school's mission and operations". Recommendations are directed at developing a framework to define the mandate. Information helps people to choose among "competing social and educational values" (ibid.) Regarding "competing" values, the Commission,

interestingly enough, does acknowledge the "ideological" aspects of schooling:

Schools, and school board offices, in effect, as well as the larger provincial stage, have become arenas where opposing ideological interests struggle for influence, if not supremacy [emphasis added] (1988b: 13).

The Commission's definition of "ideology" differs from the way the term is used elsewhere in this thesis. Smith (1987) it will be recalled views ideology as rooted in practical, daily activities. The Commission's usage of the term is consistent with a conception of ideology as abstract ideas competing in an intellectual marketplace. The Commission and similar studies and their findings are an ideological expression of "structures that 'rule' (manage, administrate, organize, and otherwise control)" (Smith, 1987: 56).

While the Commission recognizes the existence (on one level) of "ideological struggle", the nature of the "struggle" is defined, however, in terms that limits discussion and allow for a "controlled" resolution. The Report continues:

Given adequate social structures and processes for resolution, such competition or conflict is not necessarily dysfunctional or injurious to the public good but, rather, is a natural part of a democratic society's efforts to define its priorities and values in the midst of perpetually changing social circumstances and beliefs (1988b: 13).

In this functionalist conception, "conflict" and "struggle" are "sanitized" and purified of any potential disruptive implications. Apple (1979) argues that such limited

definitions of "conflict" as those expressed by the Commission contribute to a "hidden curriculum" that supports the ideological hegemony of dominant groups. That is, people learn through the schools that conflict is "*inherently* and fundamentally bad and we should strive to eliminate it *within* the established framework of institutions" (Apple, 1979: 87). Although the Commission states that "conflict" is not "necessarily dysfunctional" (while not expressly, in Apple's terms, "bad"), it does not encourage conflict either. The "opposing ideological interests" are, resolved *within* the legitimate bounds of "adequate social structures and processes". Consensus is the prominent feature in the Commission's conception of "democracy". The ideology of "consensus" integrates class antagonisms by promoting the notion of "universal interests" which conceals the class interests of the bourgeois (Mellos, 1980: 110).

The Commission's view of conflict tends to neglect an alternative conception in which conflict (or contradictions) is a necessary aspect in the self-development of concrete things and processes (as described by the dialectical concept of the "struggle and unity of opposites"). Apple (1979: 88) points out, for example, that the discovery and development of scientific knowledge are processes inherently "conflictive" as delineated by the concepts of "struggle" and "development". The processes of scientific development

illustrate the dialectical nature of change as progress: self-development through the unity and struggle of opposites. Conflict, as taught in school, emphasizes only its "positive" and "consensual" aspects. These views of conflict, according to Apple (1979: 88) are "basically unrealistic and essentially conservative perspectives on the usefulness of conflict".

Thus, while acknowledging the existence of "ideological struggles" in schools, the Commission structures "conflict" into legitimate "social structures" thereby avoiding obvious rebellion. There is a systematic distortion of the function of conflict in collectivities (Apple, 1979: 102) that conforms to capitalist relations in their ideological forms.

According to the Commission (1988b: 66-68), schools serve three main functions: providing a custodial service, socializing children and adolescents into the norms and values of society, and educating (i.e., cultivation of mind, preparation for vocational life, moral and civic development, and individual development). These functions guide school activities and, as the Commission states, are

carved in the granite of tradition and will remain an essential part of any school's activities, however, described. Schools, as they are constituted in our culture, can never escape such responsibilities because they remain fundamental to the institution's very nature (1988b: 68).

Even though the Commission supports changes in education, this excerpt illustrates its fundamentally conservative assumptions. The "granite of tradition" suggests unchanging

social behaviours which unrealistically posits a view of order, maintenance, and consensus on society. A significant point that appears to elude the Commission is that "tradition" is not "carved in granite" but changes as historical conditions develop, i.e., that "tradition" is historical and socially organized.

Another government document that obviously links business interests with educational practices is found in a publication by the Provincial Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology called *Labour Market News: Facts, Issues, Trends* (1991). In the newsletter the articles deal with issues consistent with those discussed above. There are articles on "Adapting to change and human resource investment: the economic imperative" (1991: 1), "Literacy in the workplace" (1991: 3), "Federal initiatives in labour force development" (1991: 7), and "The need for workplace training" (1991: 8). The same issues have been raised and examined by Forget (1985) and West (1988).

The emphasis of the newsletter is upon cooperation: "cooperation among industry, workers and the province's post-secondary system is essential to ensure B.C.'s competitiveness and prosperity into the next century" (1991: 4). The emphasis upon cooperation is not itself a problem, but in the document "cooperation" is closely articulated to the hegemonic interests of capital. For example, new programs are announced, such as free entry-level adult

literacy classes, in cooperation with government and industry, aimed at producing a "highly skilled and adaptable workforce". The dominating influence of corporate interests is, however, not difficult to discern:

the key to success in the labour market, as in all sectors of the economy, is adaptability. Already four waves of change are beginning to emphasize the need for more adaptable workforce in British Columbia: economic restructuring, globalization of trade and production, technological change and shifts in demographics (1991: 1).

The "need" for adaptability emerges from the relations inherent in capitalist production. No other "needs" (such as the "need" for an educated public) are evident. The *Labour News* provides the latest illustration of the discursive links between business, government, and education.

Government discourse tends to constitute certain relations (i.e., business and economic relations) and to negate the specific material conditions which engender the discourse, namely capitalism. Consequently, the discourse legitimates certain relations at the same time that it represses consciousness of alternative relations.

The themes and issues outlined above are reflected in college documents and plans generated by management. Even though the Royal Commission deals with elementary and secondary education there are correspondences among the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels in formal (e.g, continuity of curriculums, and "working committees")

links among the levels. The themes expressed in the Commission are commonly shared within the education system in British Columbia.

The themes and issues given priority and prominence by the government are taken up in college-generated discourse. It is through these actions that professional discourse is brought into relation with assessment work. The professional discourse of government, while structuring the general framework for educational practices, leaves to education professionals the task of "fleshing-out" the necessary details. Several issues, discussed above, are encapsulated in the "mission" statement for the division of the college:

Student Services is a College support division providing high quality services designed to meet the needs of students, the College and the Community. Services provided students include: (1) Support services that assist students to access the College; (2) Support service, which include personal support, educational support and developmental support whilst students are enrolled; and, (3) transition services that assist students in moving from the College to continued education, employment or re-entry. Services provided the College include: (1) services in support of student recruitment (revenue generation), student retention (revenue preservation) and student follow-up (program and service accountability); (2) systems development; (3) computer based education; and (4) records management. Services provided the Community include: (1) College publications and information; (2) Community use of College facilities; and (3) contract systems development, computer based education and institutional research services for other post secondary institutions, government, business and industry. We are committed to the timely and efficient delivery of our services through systematic planning, open communication and innovative approaches to service development and review (Unpublished document, February 9, 1988).

The "mission" is quoted at length to allow the full implication of business and government discourse to be evident. In the "mission" statement, the services provided to the College illustrate a business-oriented discourse: "revenue generation", "revenue preservation" and "accountability" and by the business emphasis for services provided to the Community. The "mission" of the division, in its turn, is translated into assessment practices by the workers (as described in Chapters Four and Five). The government emphasis on "productivity" and "quality" is reflected in the college division's "mission" statement as "timely and efficient delivery" of services. The government mandates constitute a set of social relations that, as Ng (1988: 89) points out, "legitimizes certain courses of action, thereby rendering other (alternative) forms of action illegitimate, and organizes how people relate to one another". The relations of power are mediated through documents that penetrate and organize the internal relations of the assessment unit.

Before turning to educational discourse it should be emphasized that business and government discourse are themselves relations organized within the state. The state is an organizer of discourse as well as the site of hegemonic struggle. Consistent with Gramsci's concept of the "integral state" the state is an ensemble of hegemonic apparatuses of which education, business, and government

(cabinet and civil service) are constituents (others include the judiciary such as police, courts, and the military). The state while appearing to act of behalf of all groups emphasizes the priority of a particular group's interests over those of other groups. Thus, a fundamental relation exists between the economically dominant class and the state.

Education, as a hegemonic apparatus, is one site in which the contradictions of the economic and political unite. That is, educational institutions provide not only the opportunities and experiences to train and integrate people into occupational structures (i.e., economic), but they also integrate people into the political culture. Thus, educational institutions synthesize processes and practices that produce and reproduce both workers and citizens. They are, therefore, an important site of ideological struggles by providing, as Shapiro (1982: 524) observes, a "context for the struggle between notions of community, universal responsibilities and collective obligation, and the egotistical and unequal imperatives of the market".

Education Discourse

In addition to the indirect influence of business (mediated through government and college bureaucracies) assessment work is also informed by professional discourse surrounding testing techniques. The concrete methods by

which education discourse informs and structures assessment practices are examined below.

Two examples, drawn from the literature, illustrate common ways in which assessment discourse is structured to exclude not only people but the possibilities of further discussions. The first example illustrates a technique of direct support for testing and testing corporations. The second example illustrates a more sophisticated approach.

Holmen and Docter (1972: vii) analyze the testing industry to compile "better information about the industry which generates tests and test-related services". The impetus for the study developed from American protests (or in Willis's terms "resistance") against educational testing and by federal (U.S.) policies governing testing in employment selection and promotion⁵.

The significance of testing, according to Holmen and Docter, is that "test results lead to classification and labeling procedures that often directly influence people's lives" (1972: 2). While recognizing the "everyday problematic" of testing, Holmen and Docter tend to ignore its significance. As Smith (1987: 56) maintains, these "classification and labeling procedures" illustrate the transformation of "experiences, concerns, needs, aims, interests, arising among people in the everyday and working contexts of their living" into forms of thought which "serves to organize and order the expression of the local,

particular, and directly known into forms concordant" with the "interests, aims, and perspectives of the ruling class".

Given the social impact of testing, the question that emerges for Holmen and Docter is "what kind of objective measures should be used?" rather than any questions concerning the use of testing in the first place. They tend to assume, implicitly, that tests are valid and legitimate measures. Their brief review of the major uses of tests and common criticisms of testing reveals that "poor professional practice" by "partially trained psychologists and teachers" contributes to criticisms against testing. In a rejoinder to the criticisms, Holmen and Docter suggest that "military test-development programs offer a model of excellence and a format for the type of comprehensive assessment system which we consider essential" (1972: 8).

A "central criticism" of testing, emphasized by Holmen and Docter, concerns "tests as gatekeepers". According to Holmen and Docter, at the "heart" of the controversy against testing is the fact that

tests are often used as tools for the allocation of limited resources or opportunities. Put another way, educational and psychological tests are frequently designed to measure differences among individuals so that one person receives a reward or privilege which another person is denied (1972: 14).

This "central criticism" identifies a critically important aspect in schooling; that schools are not neutral in their organization or curricular content. They are designed so that "some people fail and others succeed" (Wotherspoon,

1987: 4). However, Holmen and Docter, do not directly address the implication that tests structure inequality by differentially allocating limited resources. Instead, the initial question is transformed: "[a]re tests necessarily the kind of gatekeepers we want?". The implication is that "tests as gatekeepers" are acceptable but the method requires refinement. The answer given by Holmen and Docter is that it depends on "individual values, organizational goals, and laws and regulations" (1972: 14). Instead of examining the basic premises of testing (such as "why test?") Holmen and Docter offer methods to reduce *criticisms* of testing.

Reducing criticisms of testing may be achieved, according to Holmen and Docter, through adherence to ethical standards. Specifically, "testing programs that measure up to high professional standards and can be shown to make constructive contributions to human assessment may well be regarded as beneficial by most people" (1972: 14-15) and presumably reduce criticisms. Thus, Holmen and Docter manage to deflect attention away from the criticisms themselves (such as why people were protesting educational testing) to the more neutral and "legitimate" issue of "how to test" in ways that inspire confidence and marginalize dissent. Testing critiques are effectively shifted from the local, particular experiences of people (social level) and transformed into "professional standards" which become the

property of "partially trained psychologists and teachers" (an individual level). By locating the social "problems" of testing at an individual level, appropriate methods, techniques and models (e.g., the military) may be applied to remedy and render unproblematic the "problems".

Holmen and Docter go on to reveal insights about the testing industry that are enlightening in their uncritical acceptance and support for tests, testing, and the testing industry. Their support for testing and the testing industry is encapsulated in their concluding paragraph:

All persons and organizations involved in the testing industry must continue to expand their efforts to assure that uses of their material and programs will result in improved opportunities for all citizens. This may be accomplished through better evaluation of opportunities, qualifications for taking advantage of opportunities, and improvement of our institutions to serve more effectively the changing needs of Americans (1972: 172).

According to Holmen and Docter, what needs to change in testing are procedures and methods and not the social relations inherent in the testing process. Holmen and Docter's approach to testing is common within the professional discourse (e.g., Bracht, et al., 1972; Priestley, 1982; Evans, et al., 1986; and Heywood, 1989).

Within the discourse the technical problems of assessment and their technical solutions tend to be emphasized. This is not to suggest that the technical and statistical aspects of assessment and testing are not legitimate topics. They are. However, they tend to

dominate education discourse to the exclusion of other equally relevant topics, such as the assumptions underlying assessment. The emphasis on technique overshadows critique, to the detriment of both. When assumptions underlying testing are examined, problems are posed in ways that allow for easy and superficial resolution: alternatively, assumptions (and critics of them) are dismissed as irrelevant and unproblematic. Henry (1988: 291) provides a succinct summary of the technical emphasis:

Indeed much of the literature on assessment procedures appears to be dominated by educational measurement experts working within a psychological framework more concerned at improving assessment techniques than with an appraisal of underlying assumptions.

Another example in professional discourse that uses techniques similar to Holmen and Docter's but with an added twist is found in Satterly (1981).

Satterly's book is a guide for assessment in schools. As part of this effort, Satterly devotes twenty-six pages to "common arguments" against assessment. His aim is to introduce the "most common arguments against assessment and to sketch out the kinds of rejoinder that can be made to them" (1981: 18). To his credit, Satterly identifies issues that are "highly controversial" and in doing contributes to a critical examination of assessment discourse.

Satterly takes the analysis one step further than Holmen and Docter (1972) by outlining not only arguments but replies and rebuttals to the arguments as well. His

sophistication lies in both the form and content of his analysis. That is, not only does Satterly reveal several important assumptions supporting testing practices but he accomplishes this by structuring the arguments against testing in ways that tend to facilitate rebuttal. As Smith (1990: 75) notes the "way in which questions are framed . . . may be a powerful organizer of the version of the world . . .". Particular versions of the world are inherent in the questions and reflect the assumptions of the question writer. We will examine several examples of Satterly's technique, relevant to this thesis, to illustrate how the structure of the arguments organizes a particular version of the world.

One argument, according to Satterly, is that:

Assessment is a political activity which preserves the social order of society. . . . Assessment is part of the apparatus by which schools perpetuate the existing hierarchical structure of society, for it results in the application of labels which determine children's opportunities in further education and life itself, their social status, privilege and power, and even their 'worth'. A capitalist society such as ours has an authority structure which depends for its continued existence on the identification of an elite to occupy its most influential positions (1981: 19).

Consequently, Satterly argues that, "for those who perpetuate" this argument, "assessment does not only act as an instrument in the reproduction of inequality (which is the opposite of its ostensible function of equalizing opportunity) but that which is assessed is itself biased towards the cultural traditions of the dominant social

groups" (Satterly, 1981: 20).

This argument, it would appear, corresponds to the types of critical analyses contained in this thesis. The "kinds of rejoinder", Satterly's offers to this "argument against assessment" is in four parts. First, the notion that assessment is a political activity supports a "model of society which is held to be objectionable by the kinds of thought which characterize so much of contemporary sociological writing" (1981: 20). He agrees that assessment may "fulfil some of the functions described" but he argues it is an "oversimplification to argue that it is a fundamental cause of the value system itself" (ibid.).

Second, the criticism that assessment is a selection instrument is based on "norm-referenced testing (i.e., those in which the placement of pupils relative to one another is the principal goal)". However, this argument, according to Satterly, "loses some force" when "criterion-referenced assessment" replaces "norm-referenced" because in criterion-referenced testing there is "no implication of comparison with other children" (1981: 21). Satterly is a proponent of "criterion-referenced" assessment and promotes its use in his book.

Third, the argument rests on the (implied) assumption that "if schools and teachers were to give up their practices of assessment it would help pave the way for a better form of order than exists in society at present"

(1981: 21). But as, Satterly points out, "some assessment of competence" would be also be required even in the "better form of order" if only to protect the public.

Fourth, Satterly finds it "difficult to envisage a planned educational programme which has to justify its existence to those who will eventually determine its support without at least some form of assessment, even if this is of the system itself rather than of the individuals within it" (ibid.). It is, according to Satterly, the openness of the assessment process to scrutiny that ensures excesses and lack of fairness are identified (Satterly, 1981: 21).

Satterly structures the argument in such a way that combines elements of reproduction theory (e.g., Bowles and Gintis) with ideas about hegemony (e.g., Gramsci, 1971). Although not necessarily incompatible, there are different analytical consequences, as shown in Chapter One. By collapsing differences between the two, Satterly presents a synthesized version which, while appearing consistent, tends to ignore different analytical emphases and consequences. The synthesized version, however, is easier to rebut and dismiss with phrases such as "model of society which is held to be objectionable". Tactics, such as Satterly's, that structure a "Marxist-like" argument contribute to discursive practices that counterpose Marxism with academic arguments, and that indirectly promote anti-Marxist or anti-Soviet views (Lorch, 1984). Thus structured, Marxist critiques and

alternatives are subsequently excluded from the discussion of assessment practices.

The political nature of assessment and education is downplayed by Satterly. The theories discussed in Chapter One, however, show that assessment and education are inherently political activities. Gramsci (1971: 34), for example, argues that a guiding "educational principle" is that of "work". Connections between "work" and "education" are found in the identification with the "social and State order (*rights and duties*) [emphasis added]". The narrowly-defined State embodies "political society" which refers to the "coercive relations in the state apparatuses" (Simon, 1982: 70). "Political society" which defines the state's monopoly of coercion is part of the wider organization of consent through civil society.

"Civil society" and the "political society or the 'State'", according to Gramsci (1971: 12), are two "major superstructural levels" that "correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and 'juridical' government. The functions in question are precisely organisational and connective". Education is one organization that embodies relations belonging to *both* "civil society" and "political society". Educational relationships between students and teachers are essentially

non-coercive (civil society) but compulsory attendance, and tax based school funding reveal education's coercive elements. Thus, education interpenetrates between the relations of civil society and the state (Simon, 1982: 71). Gramsci's analysis reveals insights not apparent in Satterly's structured argument.

Satterly's own political position and support for the status quo is evident in the following quote:

To charge schools exclusively with the responsibility for bringing about changes in society at large at the expense of overlooking the paradoxical demand that they maintain and transmit what is held by consensus to be worthwhile is to deny an aspect of reality. It is only in totalitarian states that an educational system is explicitly harnessed to bring about changes required by a single ideology. As the movement towards the accountability of schools gains momentum, practices of assessment will continue only as long as they serve functions required by the majority view, as this is determined by democratic process (1981: 21).

Bailey (1986) points out that education, not only in "totalitarian states" but in British Columbia, is politicized and "harnessed to a single ideology" (e.g., "restraint"). Bailey (1986: 299) argues that "authentic education" combines contradictory purposes: the "acquisition of the knowledge, values, skills necessary to become a useful member of society" and the "critical investigation of that society in order to understand how it determines human experiences and possibilities". Thus to question society critically is a political act but it is also a fundamental part of becoming an educated human being (ibid.). Satterly appears to miss the significance of the inherent

contradictions (what Satterly calls "paradoxical demands") in education and depends on a one-sided notion of "democracy" which ignores the influence of "ideology" in relations among people.

Satterly poses another common argument against assessment, namely that

Published forms of assessment - such as standardized tests - mould school curricula and inhibit new developments. There are two strands to this objection. In the first place there is the influence on the school curriculum of the adoption of tests which define the objectives of teaching. Secondly, there is the presence of an external assessment programme in which the teacher is not free to decide whether or not pupils take the test: these are then marked outside the school, and only the overall result is communicated (1981: 32).

Satterly rebuts this objection by pointing out that the domination of curriculum by "published forms of assessment" reflects the "misuse" of the tests. According to Satterly (1981: 34), assessment can provide a "valuable basis for examinations where the school decides that the objectives of its curriculum are adequately evaluated by an existing test". However, Satterly (1981: 32) points out, given the converse the case can arise where the "assessment tail will be wagging the educational dog to the conceivable detriment of the latter". The second implied point may lead to a tendency to teach for the test. "Thus, learning to learn, which is an important aspect of the educational processing, often receives scant attention in the pursuit of examination success" (1981: 34).

Satterly, consistent with Holmen and Docter, posits test "misuse" as one basis for objections. This type of rebuttal appears to ignore objections that assessment is a form of "hidden curriculum" (Apple, 1979). Lynch (1989) argues that assessment (such as entry-level) tends to "perpetuate class hierarchies in the consumption relations of the educational system" because on the one hand it "represents the collective response of the educationally 'wise' to maximize their children's rate of educational consumption" while on the other hand it "reflects the lack of response of the educationally uninitiated" (1989: 146).

Inherent in "standardized tests" are tendencies that support the deleterious effects of assessment. Perrone maintains that the emphasis on standardized tests increases pressures on teachers and students to "pass" the test. Consequently, the "tests become the school curriculum" (Perrone, 1991: 135). The "scientific" basis⁶ upon which "standardized tests" are constructed provides an apparently legitimate rationale for their wide application, as emphasized by Ungerleider:

The scientific status of these tests provided an easy and seemingly legitimate way to select students by ability. Educational reformers argued that tests would allow schools and teachers to 'fit education to the individual needs of students'. Education had become a hierarchical meritocracy firmly supported by 'objective and unbiased' test scores (Ungerleider, 1987: 129).

Thus, in the recent literature there is evidence suggesting that arguments, such as offered by Satterly regarding test

"misuse", are superficial and do not address essential relations.

The final objection to assessment, according to Satterly, we will review is that:

Assessment inevitably takes place in a role-relationship. This is antithetical to a truly educational setting where encounters between teachers and pupils are interpersonal (1981: 35).

As Satterly correctly points out "any assessment is made by someone about someone" (1981: 35). Inherent in this relationship is a power relationship between teacher and pupil in which the pupil is placed in a position of inferiority and dependence. In the "role-relationship" of assessment, according to Satterly, the "goal of the teacher is to 'categorize and objectify' aspects of the pupil. By contrast, truly educational transactions occur when 'whole persons encounter one another on an equal basis" (1981: 36).

Satterly's reply is simple: "there is nothing in assessment inherently inimical to the establishment of a teacher-pupil relationship of the type advocated by humanistic psychologists, where pupils have shared with teachers the experiences of learning in which the assessment of the outcome has been used to promote the competence of the pupil" (1981: 36-37).

As Gramsci points out there are non-coercive relations inherent in teacher-student relations. Those relations, however, are organized within conditions of the "political society" that are "inherently inimical" to a personal

relationship. The local relations between teacher and student are transformed through the institutional activities of schools into "extralocal" relations. Smith (1987: 3) argues that the relations of ruling continually transcribe the local and particular relations into abstracted and generalized forms (such as "test scores"). While Satterly correctly points out that "assessment is made *by* someone *about* someone" he ignores the effects of "organizational logics" (such as the forms of organization mediated through discourse and text) that transfer the judgments and knowledge from individuals to the "practices of bureaucratic administration" to the "governing processes of capitalist enterprise" (Smith, 1987: 5).

The works by Satterly and Holmen and Docter illustrate concrete methods and techniques through which professional discourse in education structures the problems and conceptual practices deemed relevant to assessment. These examples are not by any means isolated cases. Taken together they point to a general approach within educational assessment which provides an ideological linkage of institutional practices to the "relations of ruling". Several significant features in this discourse include a tendency to abstract in an ahistorical manner political and economic conditions, an unconscious acceptance of "what exists" as a "natural" state, an over-reliance on methodological empiricism, a linear one-way view of

development, an emphasis on "means" without a corresponding emphasis on "ends", and generally, a narrow view of human development and potential.

Professional discourse organizes the local relations of assessment workers in conjunction with institutional relations to regulate the themes, topics, relevances, and problems appropriate to assessment work. The appropriate techniques and methods considered legitimate to deal with problems are inherent within those relations. Professional discourse informs and supports the bureaucratic and political organization of education in a capitalist society.

Notes

1. Forget's emphasis on private funding is consistent with arguments favouring minimal government. For example, Allen (1986) examines the relationship between investment and education in British Columbia. One aim of minimal government, according to Allen, is to increase the rate of capital formation by reducing "social and educational spending so that foot-loose manufacturing firms can be lured to B.C. with tax incentives" (Allen, 1986: 196). Contrary to government claims of "insufficient investment", Allen argues, based on his analysis, that there is "no evidence for the existence of the problems that so vex the provincial government. The problems are ideological fantasies, not actual difficulties" (Allen, 1986: 196).
2. West's analysis is part of a series of studies commissioned by the Fraser Institute. The Fraser Institute is particularly active in British Columbia producing "reliable information" necessary to market the neo-conservative ideology. While claiming its "nonprofit" and "independent" status, funding sources for the Institute connect it directly and closely to large Canadian and American corporations (see Stainsby and Malcolmson, 1983).
3. Another book in the "service sector" series examines elementary, secondary and vocational schooling (Easton, 1988). Easton's examination of issues such as "efficiency in production", "teacher/student ratios", and the "value of education" supports recommendations for a "flexible" arrangement between governments (provincial and federal) and parents. The "flexible" approach calls for a move away from "state-produced educational services" to one in which parents, through a voucher and subsidy system, choose a public (or private) school. According to Easton (1988: 109) such a system "provides an opportunity to make the school system more effective in meeting the wishes of parents and taxpayers".
4. These goals represent a shift away from "community" colleges to "corporate" colleges. The *Task Force on the Community College in British Columbia* (1974) presents a synthesis of community and corporate interests in its recommendations. While it recognizes the critical links between business, labour, and education, namely, the "development of Career, Vocational, and Technical Programmes be accelerated to

provide greater opportunity for training to meet the diverse needs of British Columbia (1974: 22), the Task Force emphasizes the "community" aspect of community colleges: "That the college's *highest priority* be the provision of learning opportunities throughout the wider community [emphasis added]" (1974: 13). For further studies regarding the goals of community colleges see Dennison and Levin, 1988; and Levin and Dennison, 1989.

5. Although Canada has not (yet) experienced public protests (or "resistance") to educational testing, conditions similar to those in the United States (e.g., legislated minimum competency standards and compulsory entry-level testing) are being created in Canada by strategies such as the "British Columbia Norms Project" and the "Year 2000".
6. The development of standardized tests reflects the assumptions of established psychological principles of human development. The inherited qualities of "intelligence" provides a pseudo-scientific cloak for objective testing. As an inborn trait intelligence was held to be stable and thus measurable. "Individual needs, it was argued, could be better met in homogeneous groups ranked by age and IQ" (Bleasdale, 1978: 24). For further discussion of mental testing see, for example, Hoffmann, 1962; Lawler, 1978; Gould, 1981; and Rose, et al., 1984.

CHAPTER SEVEN**POLITICAL AND BUREAUCRATIC ORGANIZATION OF EDUCATION**

This chapter links the preceding analysis of the relations of assessment work with education more generally considered. The analysis in this chapter "suggests", rather than explicates, how the political and bureaucratic organization of education "organizes" assessment work. Much of the analytic work has already been done. The analysis is based on the premise that public schooling in capitalist political economies is a capitalist education. Public education's political organization is a capitalist one. That is, the terms of governance for colleges are, in part, the legal expression (through legislated laws) of bourgeois interests. The development of community colleges has transformed the original progressive elements of a college for the community into one for corporate interests. Community colleges are the "proletarian university" for working people. They tend to reflect, produce, and reproduce a differentiated labour force to meet the needs of capital. The bureaucratic organization of education, reflecting capitalist political and economic organization, promotes "individual" needs as a necessary component, and basis, for societal advancement.

Entry-level assessment is ostensibly intended to reveal examinees' current levels of English skills (e.g., reading comprehension and writing) so that examinees may begin their

educational careers at a course level appropriate to their demonstrated skills. The accurate placement of examinees into "appropriate" college courses is presumed to enhance the probability of student success. Another aspect of assessment work is a mediating one. That is, the work of assessment assists the college (and the education system) to legitimate and rationalize contradictions between ideologies of access, equality and social mobility on the one hand and limited educational resources on the other. Oakes (1986: 61) argues that, contrary to popular notions, schools provide only the *conditions* for access not the results. Oakes's analysis, it may be argued, is also appropriate for community colleges. That is, the college provides the opportunity (through assessment) for *individuals* to develop their "potential". The "rewards" (e.g., wealth, prestige, and power) associated with education are based on "fair competition" in a "neutral" and "meritocratic" publicly supported institution. Any failure to realize some or all of the "rewards" is seen as a property of the individual, not the college institution or the organization of education. The college thus encourages people to identify themselves as autonomous subjects, as the authors of their own fate. The attributes, skills, and abilities for individual success (e.g., "hard work", and "discipline") are also presented as necessary for a group in general. There is a generalization from an "individualistic logic to a

group logic without a recognition of the very different nature and level of abstraction of the latter" (Willis, 1977: 129).

We have seen that within the assessment process are practices that tend to abstract examinees from their capacity to be competent practitioners of their everyday world. Examinees' experiences are re-constituted through various procedures (i.e., the test instrument, and documentation practices) into forms alienated from their "lived actualities". The work organization of the college contributes to the abstraction process by structuring institutional and ideological processes that reproduce and maintain the "relations of ruling".

Throughout the analysis the relations of assessment have been seen in their connection to the institution's practices and the practices of the "institutional modes". Those practices are informed and supported by discourses from business, government, and education. Professional discourse becomes a constituent of the college's assessment practices, in part, through "professional development" activities organized by the college. Professional discourse tends to structure the themes, topics, problems, and conceptual practices considered legitimate and relevant to assessment work. Professional discourse represents one form of ideological resolution of the contradiction between promoting equality while producing differentiated and

unequal labour power.

The structuring of issues, relevances, and debates through professional discourse serves to protect the overall system by absorbing criticism within education. That is, the framing of issues such as "falling academic standards", "uneducated graduates", "excellence in education", "returning to learning" and so forth, deflects attention away from capitalism's inadequate provision of jobs, or the trend toward an elitist, exclusive educational system. One consequence is that the "political right has been able to gain ascendancy in political discussions of education" (West, 1981: 95).

In general, the analysis has illustrated the practical ways in which the test writing activities of individuals are articulated to the "relations of ruling". In Chapter One connections between education and capitalism were described, showing how the capitalist political economy conditions, enables, facilitates, maintains, and supports a certain form of education. Entry-level assessment, it was argued, legitimates placement decisions which have to be made in light of scarce resources. The assessment practices, in the main, mediate between limited educational resources and the ideologies of "access", "equality of opportunity" and "mobility". A critically important relation is that between education and the state.

In Gramsci's theorizing the political dimension represents the "expressive form of the common interests of a society" (Mouffe, 1979: 10). Political organization permeates the structures and "superstructures" and provides an articulating principle linked, in Gramsci, to the "notion of integral state (coercion + hegemony)" (ibid.). The "integral state" encompasses more than an enlarged government or monopoly capitalism. It is a conception that points to the integrated and embedded nature of the state in the "entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but manages to win the active consensus of those over whom it rules" (Gramsci, 1971: 244). It signals that civil society is a site where the hegemony of the bourgeoisie is exercised. Civil society is thus critical to the "possibility and necessity of creating a new culture" (ibid.: 276).

Bobbio (1979: 33) presents the thesis that in Gramsci's work there is a "double inversion" in relation to Marx: the "primacy of the ideological superstructures over the economic structure", and the "primacy of civil society (consensus) over political society (force)". While Bobbio's assertion may overstate the relation between ideas and matter, it suggests that at a certain stage ideas may appear in a "material" form. It is in this sense that the ideological has primacy over the economic. Bobbio, quoting

Gramsci, continues: "it is not the economic structure which directly determines political action, but it is the interpretation of it and of the so-called laws which rule its development" (ibid.: 33). The primacy of ideological over economic (and of consensus over force) is evident in the relations of assessment work.

The analysis in this thesis has suggested that the practice of entry-level assessment is created by and developed through assessment workers' active interpretations of plans structured by the college. While the college's entry-level assessment practices are not directly connected to economic imperatives, they are certainly conditioned and influenced by the priority of economic issues (see Chapter Six). An important aspect of assessment work (as described in Chapter Five) is legitimating placement decisions to examinees. This activity illustrates people's (i.e., workers' and test writers') active role in creating and sustaining ideological practices, consistent with Gramsci's (and Marx's) emphasis on the role of human will and ideas.

The state's, and particularly the government's, interpretation of the economic problems and conditions significantly affects entry-level assessment. The political actions of the provincial government in response to economic conditions have given primacy to consensus-building over the use of force. There are indications that, in British Columbia, increased emphasis on assessment and a favourable

political "climate" for increasing assessment practices function as the "engine for implementing educational policy" (Rogers, 1990: 53). That is, in addition to curricular reform, organizational (structural) changes, assessment is used to implement policy, thereby circumventing more democratic routes that include public input (perhaps through discussion). For example, education policy publicly promoting, for instance, "community needs for learning" may be re-defined through assessment practices to accommodate "customized contract training"¹ (i.e., short-term courses and workshops developed by colleges (or universities) to meet the training needs of specific employers). Students (or in the case of entry-level assessment - potential students) may be "encouraged" to "re-define" their educational goals to match available "contract" courses (such as cashier training). Through the gatekeeping mechanism of entry-level assessment specific courses may be filled or "capped" according to market (and employer) demands.

Thus, education policies reflecting corporate interests and concerns (such as "productivity", "accountability", "balanced funding", and "efficiency") may be implemented through assessment practices without the use of force and be implemented in ways that support ideological conceptions (such as "entrepreneurship", and "individual initiatives") to which people consent. Through such activity in civil

society the "*material conditions* are thereby resolved into an *instrument* for action and with this the *desired aim* is reached (Bobbio, 1979: 35).

We saw in Chapter Five that embedded within the entry-level assessment practices, relations of class are reproduced and maintained. Class relations are further stratified through the political and bureaucratic organization of education by relations of gender and race/ethnicity.

The tendency within the education system is to abstract people from their activities and to transform them into generalized forms. Class, gender, and race/ethnic divisions are thus maintained and even extended. Inequality is structured within the institution's bureaucratic practices, which organize the relations among its participants. It is, however, in the actions of people that the possibilities for transforming assessment practice lie.

Implications for Further Assessment Practices

Given the favourable "political climate" regarding assessment (Rogers, 1990), the calls to improve accessibility (Royal Commission of Education, 1988b; Access Committee Report, 1988a), and the recommendations to expand and centralize assessment practices (Ministry of Education, 1985; Rennie, 1991), it is likely that assessment will continue to be a way to "monitor and evaluate school effectiveness and, thereby, to ensure that quality exists

within the system" (Rogers, 1990: 63). It also appears likely that assessment practices will expand at all levels in the education system in B.C. A codicil should be made; entry-level assessment practices analyzed in this thesis reflect the priorities of a Social Credit government. The priorities of this government tended to favour economic imperatives for profit over social priorities.

The classic question then arises: What is to be done? Deterministic tendencies in the "reproduction" theory of Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) appear to instill a fatalism that inhibits change-oriented action. Bourdieu and Passeron's (1979: 40) analysis suggests that people are "totally prisoners" of the "cultural arbitrary" that "imposes [itself] on their thought and practice". Given such overpowering dominance, there seems little hope of human *activity* let alone change.

Alternatively, one may propose fundamental economic reforms that would restructure the labour process. For example, the analysis of Bowles and Gintis suggest that education is directly functional to capitalism so that economic changes must precede educational change. If their proposals were to be followed, i.e., to work toward a "far-reaching economic transformation" of capitalism through "revolutionary social change" it would mean that education reform efforts could merely react (or correspond) to the needs of the economic structure. Furthermore, the sheer

magnitude of the needed "revolutionary change" that in their analysis must accompany a "common consciousness of capitalist oppression" (Bowles and Gintis, 1976: 286) might overwhelm even the most determined and stout-hearted of reformers.

The ideas of Smith (1987, 1990), Willis (1977), Apple (1979, 1982) and Gramsci (1971) appear to be the most fruitful and stimulating for the possibilities of human agency. Smith's (1987) emphasis on the abstraction of the local particular everyday experiences into general and generalized forms through the relations of ruling indicates that local actions by people contribute to and sustain the relations of ruling. Therefore, change promoting a restructuring of the labour process may be accomplished through local actions within particular relations among people in their everyday activities. A part of that action could be a reconstruction of the relations of social consciousness among participants through a reconstruction of assessment-related activities.

One set of concrete alternatives has been outlined by Lytle, et al. (1985) in *The People's Report*². The Report contains social and economic alternatives for British Columbia. The Report argues that the provision of "quality education" and "equal educational opportunities" are important social priorities because (1) the "concept that every individual should have the opportunity to develop his

or her potential to the fullest necessarily entails a social responsibility to make the best possible education available and accessible to every person"; and (2) the "development of a healthy economic and political structure depends upon a highly educated public" (*The People's Report*, 1985: 33). Rather than a dominant emphasis on training to "meet the needs of contemporary industry and commerce", the Report calls for an equal emphasis on "education in the broader sense" (*ibid.*).

A proposal regarding entry-level assessment may be made, in light of the Report's call for an integration of training and education, to remove the dualism between an "open-door" policy in "principle" and in "practice". An authentic "open-door" policy, I would argue, is not qualified in terms of a "revolving-door" or "placement level". A radical change would be to end entry-level assessment practices. Ending entry-level assessment practices would, of course, necessitate other changes in college admission policies. The *Task Force on the Community College in British Columbia* (1974: 31) offers the following recommendation:

Applicants shall be admitted to colleges, provided they have

- (a) graduated from a secondary school, or
- (b) left the school system and are capable of profiting by the instruction offered.

This recommendation appears to retain the spirit of "open admissions" described by Dennison and Gallagher (1986: 74): "applicants could 'try' programmes of their choice regardless of previous scholastic performance and regardless of the length of time they had been out of formal education".

However, given the relation of assessment to the "ruling relations" examined in this thesis and the favourable "political climate" in British Columbia regarding assessment, the abolition of entry-level assessment does not appear likely. Another option that uses existing practices is presented below.

The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) has provided one possible outline. In a submission to the Ontario Select Committee on Education, the OFL (1988) presents its version of "educational goals", namely: the "need to eliminate class bias" (1988: 62); the "need to avoid reducing education to training" (1988: 63); the "need to link theory and practice" (ibid.); the "need to make bias explicit" (ibid.: 64); the need for "equality of results" (ibid.: 65); and the principle that "education is collective" (ibid.: 66).

The OFL calls for a "broadening of creative intellectual work to all students, not a reduction of education to job training" (ibid.: 61). The elements necessary to implement these goals already exist in the system and are "known and practised in one place or another"

(ibid.: 66), thus eliminating the need to "create" the educational goals. The OFL, essentially, calls for a transformation of existing practices by replacing the "corporate" emphasis (engendered by "individualistic learning" fostered through "competition") with a "collective" one (1988: 66). The collective emphasis would "equip everyone with the basic ability to acquire information, reason clearly, to think critically, to communicate one's ideas effectively, and to try to put one's ideas and knowledge into practice" (1988: 61-62). While many of the OFL's proposals are struck at a general level there are elements relevant to the practice of entry-level assessment.

One element is the call to "make bias explicit", viz., "making the teacher's and program's biases explicit so they can be the subject of critical examination and questioning and be an integral part of the learning process" (1988: 65). In entry-level assessment making biases explicit could be done at several levels. At the examinee level producing and distributing practice tests, providing test writing clinics, even distributing information about test content would "open" the assessment process to include the test writers. Rather than assessment that is done *to* someone, assessment could be done *with* someone.

At an institutional level, revealing and critically examining biases might include an open discussion of the

basic reason(s) for assessing. Why assess? If it is to "select qualified candidates" and "screen" out the remaining candidates then assessment practices with this goal explicitly stated might be developed. The point is, any decision to assess, or not to assess, is already a "biased" decision. It is also a political choice with educational, economic, and philosophical consequences.

Revealing biases might also include a realistic assessment of entrance standards. What is the "actual" reading level in the course texts? Is an entrance level of Grade 12 English appropriate to the content of the program? Is it too high, too low? Commonly, entrance standards tend to conform to the standards of the "profession" associated with a program (e.g, communication program is related to journalism, and the print and television media) or to "traditional" standards (i.e., entrance standards established at college creation).

The basis for the assessment, the test instrument, could be examined critically, and not just statistically. What are the correspondences, if any, between the instrument's test "objectives" and the educational objectives of the college (or program)? A multi-assessment approach may be implemented to shift emphasis from standardized tests to other forms of assessment, such as portfolios and interviews. Hargreaves (1989: 159), analyzing curriculum and assessment reform in England,

suggests "minimizing the role of assessment in relation to educational selection". West (1981: 93) suggests that even within the "framework of advanced international industrial capitalism" possible solutions include existing practices such as using a grading system that is "highly criterion referenced", "allowing students as long as they need to jump through the appropriate hoops for certification", and relegating certification "to interested universities and industries".

Making biases explicit makes use of "low-tech" resources. It begins with existing practices and currently available resources and technology. It does not have to wait for "far-reaching" structural changes in the economy. Making biases explicit acknowledges the "value-laden" nature of learning, in contrast to a "value-free" "unbiased" conception. This in itself marks a move away from the current hegemony in education.

Efforts to transform assessment practice must also take into account the relations with the state. Gramsci's insights reveal the integral role of the state in mediating capitalist accumulation, coercive control, and legitimation. The state is not to be conceived as some monolith representing only capitalist interests, although those interests may be dominant. Hegemony functions to resolve the contradictions between domination and consensus. Bobbio (1979: 41) maintains that hegemony is the "moment of

junction between determinate objective conditions and the actual domination of a leading group: this junction comes about *in civil society*". Further, the basis for change consists in the "transformation of the social relations of civil society, as the basis for the transformation of the state apparatuses and of the organisations of civil society- churches, schools, political parties, trade unions, etc., as well as the family" (Simon, 1982: 74-75). This means that to change assessment practice may require one to work both for and against the state.

Notes

1. See Pincus, 1989.
2. The Report is part of the Solidarity Coalition's efforts to present alternatives to the Social Credit "restraint" policies implemented in 1983. The Solidarity Coalition established the People's Commission for Social and Economic Alternatives in 1984. The objectives of the Commission were as follows:
 1. To formulate clear, positive and consistent social and economic policy alternatives to the government's policies by developing a clear understanding of the concerns of people in B.C. regarding the government's policies, and by evaluating the impact of those policies on the people of B.C.
 2. To publish and distribute widely a report on its findings and recommendations and to use both the report and the hearing process to assist the Solidarity Coalition in developing policy alternatives and to aid in the fight against the current policies of the government (*The People's Report*, 1985: ii).

The Report is a "counter-hegemonic" discourse illustrating the type of concrete "local" actions possible within the "relations of ruling".

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