This chapter is about the education of “white collar” workers. I use this term very loosely to include professionals, technical specialists in and around corporate headquarters, and managers—the foot soldiers of corporate power. I find this group particularly interesting because of the way in which they see themselves. In a society where the conventional wisdom states that we do not see ourselves in class terms, these workers, who make up about 15 percent of the labor force, do see themselves as a group separate from and with different interests than blue-collar workers. In many ways, this group’s self-image mirrors the traditional Marxist cosmology that the world was divided into the working class (or labor), the managerial class, and the capitalist class. This division of the world is, of course, problematic in that it ignores the fact that managers, like labor, are employees of capital. This leads to the general question that typically interests me. That is, by what processes do white-collar workers come to imagine their interests as linked to the interests of capital, rather than the interests of the broader working-class?

This question is not irrelevant to the study of the capitalist labor process. Clearly, in order to take on their role as organizational agents for capital, a change in their subjective perception of self is required. This chapter will argue that this change in self-perception is a key ingredient to the group of employees’ consent to the division of labor and the capitalist labor process.
“PLAYING THE GAME”—
PROBLEMS IN MANUFACTURING CONSENT

In his classic workplace ethnography *Manufacturing Consent* (1979), sociologist Michael Burawoy argued that consent to the capitalist labor process is derived by “playing the game” of “making out.” That is, consent is manufactured through the compensation system. By “playing the game” workers are co-opted into their role in the system. As Burawoy (1979, 79) stated: “[o]ne cannot both play the game and at the same time question the rules.”

In attempting to apply this schema to white-collar workers, I note that it varies little from early management theorist Chester Barnard’s theory of authority ([1938] 1968) and its elaboration in Cyert and March (1963). Here, consent, or “zone of indifference” as it is called by these authors, is obtained through co-optation created through the use of “side payments” derived from “organizational slack.” If the individual demonstrates that he or she is willing to play the game, she or he is duly rewarded. This formulation of consent seems reasonable if one focuses only on the control of task performance and levels of productivity; that is, production workers’ willingness to meet quotas or white-collar workers’ willingness to put in extra hours for the same pay. However, utilizing this scheme is difficult to explain, for example, foremen in General Motors assembly plants have been reported to actually “enjoy” being in activity that would draw grievances from their unionized workers (Hamper 1992).

Burawoy (1979, 82) made the claim that:

I am not arguing that playing the game rests on a broad consensus; on the contrary, consent rests upon—a constructed through—playing the game. The game does not reflect an underlying harmony of interests; on the contrary, it is responsible for and generates that harmony. The source of the game itself does not lie in a preordained value consensus but in historically specific struggles to adapt to the deprivation inherent in work and struggles with management to define the rules.

Here I part company with Burawoy’s analysis. Burawoy argued that it is the game itself that both manufactures consent and obscures the relations of production. What I will demonstrate is that the game is played in an arena in which all of the players know the rules long before they hear the starting whistle. That is, consent is first created in people’s heads and then reinforced by the playing of the game. Institutions beyond the workplace, such as the media and, as I argue here, schools, function to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. (Herman and Chomsky 1988, 1)

Thus, long before their first day in the workplace, working-class lads “learn to labor” (Willis 1977, 1981), working-class girls “become clerical workers” (Valli 1986), and female undergraduates are “educated in romance” (Holland and Eisenhart 1990).

SCHOOLING AND CAPITALISM

What I will argue is that we cannot understand the control of the labor process, and in particular control of white-collar labor processes, without understanding the role of schooling in capitalism. For it is schooling that creates the subjective arena in which consent will take place. Further on in this chapter, I will argue that collegiate-level business schools are the pinnacle of schooling. But first, I want to examine schooling under capitalism in general. In their essential text, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976, 54) demonstrated that schooling under capitalism is:

dominated by the imperatives of profit and domination rather than human need. The unavoidable necessity of growing up and getting a job in the United States forces us all to become less than we could be: less free, less secure, in short less happy. The U.S. economy is a formally totalitarian system in which the actions of the vast majority (workers) are controlled by a small minority (owners and managers).

Making U.S. capitalism work involves: insuring minimal participation in decision making by the majority (the workers); protecting a single minority (capitalists and managers) against the wills of a majority; and subjecting the majority to the maximal influence of this single unrepresentative minority.
Or as Daniel Liston (1988, 16) put it:

At the risk of oversimplification, this connection can be presented in the following manner: schools produce minimally skilled workers for wage labor, and these institutions “educate” workers to an ideology of compliance.

The general argument in the radical critique of schooling literature runs as follows. The primary dilemma of capital is that roughly 80 percent of the workforce needs to be simultaneously excluded from any meaningful participation in the economy and yet needs to be utilized in the production of goods that brings wealth to a small minority of capitalists. Thus there is both a need for control and an “unfortunate” dependency. The ramification for education is the “factory model” of schooling, with its emphasis on structure, discipline, and order. In schools under capitalism children are taught how to be “on task” and to regulate their work habits, bladders, and bowels to the demands of a time clock.¹

The rise of large-scale industrial capitalism creates an even larger paradox: the rise of the professional manager. While traditional Marxists conceptually lump owners and managers together, they are, in fact, distinct entities (Roomkin 1989). Thus, we have a group of employees who are at once waged workers of the organization while at the same time, agents of capital’s control over the productive process. This separation of ownership from control is further exacerbated as firms grow larger and a greater number of managers are added. It falls on the public school system to supply capital with the necessary labor to take these positions, and requires the schooling system to ensure that while these white-collar workers have the required technical skills, they also have appropriate attitudes to carry out the tasks that will be asked of them.

Socialization to this role is both subtle and incomplete. It starts early in schooling, with the purposeful skimming of the top 10 percent (or so) of students into what will eventually become the “college track” curriculum in the secondary school. Simultaneously, tracking starts the process of socializing these individuals’ perception of a world divided into “us and them.” This is further solidified by the secondary school experience, where the isolation of the college-bound is accomplished not only in the academic but also in the extracurricular arena.²

By the time individuals find themselves in college they have spent a substantial portion of their time isolated from those whom they will later be asked to manage.

**MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AS SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE**

The central premise of this chapter is that collegiate-level business and management “education” is a form of symbolic violence.³ In the previous part of this chapter, it has been argued that the public school system under capitalism begins the process of schooling future college graduates to see themselves as a class separate from non–college graduates. Thus it creates the division in the working-class between, essentially, blue-collar and white-collar workers. That division is further widened and then cemented through the schooling of future managers.

The principle by which “symbolic violence” is imposed, according to French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, is through schooling or what he calls “pedagogic action” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). The imposition of cultural arbitraries—in this case, the perceived differentiation of class interests between blue-collar and white-collar employees—and the perceived allying of white-collar class interests with those of the power elite⁴ can be seen as the primary role of management “education.” Pedagogic action is delegated by those in power to agents who exercise pedagogic authority, the right (through claim to expertise) to transmit pedagogic communication; that is, deliver the message of the cultural arbitraries. This is explored in the following section.

**PEDAGOGIC AUTHORITY**

Elsewhere (Ehrensal 1999) I have argued that the business school accreditation process acts to establish pedagogic authority. Here I summarize that argument. According to Bourdieu:

Because every PA [pedagogic action] that is exerted commands by definition a PAu [pedagogical authority], the pedagogic transmitters are from the outset designated as fit to transmit that which they transmit… (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, 20, emphasis added)

Every agency (agent or institution) exerting a PA [pedagogic action] commands PAu [pedagogic authority] in its capacity as the
mandated representative of the groups or classes whose cultural arbitrary it imposes in accordance with a mode of imposition defined by the arbitrary, i.e. as the delegated holder of the right to exercise symbolic violence. (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, 24, emphasis added)

In a commentary in the Journal of Management Education, Wanda Smith (1994, 238) explicitly posited that it is the role of (undergraduate) management education to “satisfy management’s expectation of anticipatory socialization.” She explains:

Business faculty have been given the responsibility of instilling students with the desired technical skills, as well as with anticipatory socialization—exposing them to beliefs and values of organizations of which they aspire to become members. Principally, employers expect business graduates to have developed belief systems and a variety of survival skills . . . prior to joining their organization.

Thus, business professors are imbued with pedagogic authority, and delegated the right and responsibility to impose the required ideological training upon their charges so that when graduates join organizations after the completion of their studies, they will accept the system of authority as legitimate.

However, only those who are “designated as fit” may be assigned these roles. This is no trivial point in American business education. Currently there are two non-governmental organizations for the accreditation of business programs and schools—the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP). While specifics of the criteria for accreditation differ between the two organizations (AACSB accreditation is geared primarily for research-oriented schools, while ACBSP focuses on teaching-oriented programs), each has specific guidelines concerning the credentials of the faculty, the structures of the curriculum, and content of specific courses.

As for faculty credentials, the research-oriented AACSB defines the primary qualification to be a doctoral degree in a relevant business discipline. It then allows for doctoral degrees in “related” disciplines, when they are supplemented with a business-oriented research program. Under the rules, economists or industrial psychologists who received their degrees from faculties of arts and sciences fall into this second category. ACBSP is more “liberal” in its policy, having two categories for faculty—doctorally qualified and professionally qualified. They are less stringent about the discipline of one’s doctorate, as long as it is either in a business discipline or a related field. Professionally qualified means either M.Phil./A.B.D. in a business discipline, a M.B.A. and industrial experience, or some degree and substantial executive-level experience. In either case, discipline must be maintained (Foucault 1979) and “outsiders” must be eliminated. Further, while not all schools are accredited, most programs are “associate members” of either one or both of these organizations. Therefore their guidelines drive the staffing policy throughout the “industry.”

PEDAGOGIC ACTION

Again, according to Bourdieu:

All pedagogic action (PA) is objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power. (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, 3)

In any given social formation the cultural arbitrary which the power relations between the groups or classes making up that social formation put into the dominant position within the system of cultural arbitrariess is the one which most fully, though always indirectly, express the objective interests (material and symbolic) of the dominant groups or classes. (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, 9)

To understand how business faculty fulfill this responsibility, we must examine how they carry out their pedagogic work. Pedagogic work is defined as:

a process of inculcation which must last long enough to produce a durable training, i.e. a habitus, 5 the product of internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable of perpetuating itself after PA [pedagogic action] has ceased and thereby of perpetuating in practices the principles of the internalized arbitrary. (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, 31)
Both the overall curriculum and the content of specific courses are also dictated by the accrediting organizations (Ehrensal 1999). The principal purpose of undergraduate business education is to inculcate in students various forms of habitus that are both adaptive to and desired by the organizations with which they seek to find employment. This habitus serves the organization’s interests by making the inculcated individuals “self-controlling” actors within the organization, and by elevating the need for various overt control systems (supervision, technological controls, and bureaucratic controls). The inculcation of this managerial habitus is accomplished through several types of pedagogic action commonly found in business school classrooms.

All undergraduate business students are exposed to the same core of courses during the early stages of their business education (Ehrensal 1999). These courses consist of micro- and macroeconomics, a year of financial accounting, principals of management, principals of marketing, and an introductory course in corporate finance. These courses share the following common features:

- The teaching of these courses is highly textbook dependent, that is, instructors rarely, if ever, use primary sources.
- An examination of the various textbooks in the market for any of these courses reveals that they are highly uniform in content, varying only in such features as the level of writing and the use of color and graphics.
- A significant portion of the textbook is dedicated to introducing the student to new specialized vocabulary.
- Typical mass-market texts come with significant amounts of instructor “resources,” including detailed lecture outlines and notes; test banks with both objective and essay questions, plus outlines of correct answers for the essays; and instructor’s case notes, detailing the correct student responses to end-of-the-chapter case studies and problems.

The world portrayed in business textbooks is one of simplified certainty. There are distillations of management practice and knowledge (both folk and expert), which in the world are highly context-bound, contingent, and probabilistic. In contrast, text knowledge appears to be normative, certain, and based on universal precepts. I will return in a moment to the issues of how and what is included (and what is excluded), but first, I will look at the pedagogic authority of the textbook.

Written in third person passive voice, it does not present what the particular author thinks or believes to be true about management, but rather a litany of what the recognized “experts” have found to be “true.” Thus, what is included in the text becomes the received knowledge of the sages, and as management professors Stephen Fineman and Yannis Gabriel (1994, 379) noted in their analysis of rhetorical techniques in organizational behavior textbooks, “[a] text’s persuasiveness can depend as much on what is excluded as what is included.” Strategic exclusions (the null curriculum [Eisner 1985]) can reduce ambiguity and given the authority of the text, banish particular perspectives from the field. Excluded from the textbooks are any perspectives that question the capitalist project, suggest that organizations are or could be dysfunctional, or suggest that any interests beyond those of the stockholders might be seriously taken account of in the decision-making process.

The second form of pedagogic action is the classroom lecture. This in many ways is more complex than the issues raised by textbooks. Here, both the lecturer and the lecture bear their own (somewhat) independent pedagogic authority. The lecturer often brings two forms of authority with her or him. The first is based upon his or her institutional role. As the faculty of record, with the authority to both present material and evaluate student performance (an issue to be discussed later), the faculty assume an identity transcendent of their particular personalities. In this sense, they share pedagogic authority with all other faculty in all other disciplines. Here, however, we are interested in examining their pedagogic authority to inculcate managerial habitus. In that role, we must examine how business faculty establish pedagogic authority beyond their purely institutional role. It is not uncommon for business faculty to create pedagogic authority by making reference to their connections to the business community. This is done either by reference to the business careers that they had prior to coming to academia or by claims about the business consulting practices that they have. Reference to these is made either when they are talking about their biographies, or as anecdotes in lectures where reference to their experience is meant to illustrate a point being transmitted in the lecture. Thus, in the business school classroom the pedagogic authority of the lecturer is derived through a combination of institutional and personal authority.

The pedagogic authority of the lecture itself is similarly highly
complex. In part, the lecture derives authority from its consistency with the textbook. That is, to the degree that it is consistent with the textbook it is deemed acceptable by the student. This is not as problematic as it may seem on its face. All mass-market textbooks in this area come accompanied by extensive supplemental materials for the instructor, including highly detailed lecturer notes that summarize material included in the text as well as "enrichment" materials that reinforce the message in the text, but are not included in it (e.g., blue boxes). Thus, the typical lecture is one that reiterates material from the text, utilizes third party examples—from sources like the lecturer's notes—and often inserts relevant examples from the individual's own experience. To the degree that these are consistent with the messages derived directly from the text, they are seen as having authority.

However, we must recognize that beyond consistency, lectures themselves—consistent or not—bear pedagogic authority. As Bourdieu (1991) pointed out, lectures are a form of the "discourse of authority" and as such are authorized language. They represent the delegation of that authority from higher, yet potentially obscured sources. Thus, the lecturer, in his or her speech act, is not recognized necessarily as speaking for herself or himself, but rather is seen as speaking for the institution itself. Thus, the lecture, like the relationship of the textbook to its author, has the potential to be transcendent of its speaker.

Case Studies

Case study analysis as a form of pedagogic action has its origin in the business school but has, over time, spread to other administrative programs. The case study itself presents the student with a scenario, sometimes based upon reality and sometimes fictional, in which the student is to bring to bear appropriate theoretical and conceptual frameworks for its analysis. In doing so, the student demonstrates that she or he can take the general and universal and apply it correctly to the specific. As Stewart (1991, 121) explained: "The management case study teaches theory by fulfilling two functions: (1) illustration (translating from the abstract to the concrete), and (2) socialization (conveying the paradigm that governs the theory's application)." Stewart (1991, 122) continued:

The second function of the case study [socialization] is to help bring the neophyte into the community of the discipline. A case study conveys the theoretical paradigm to new members of the theoretical community by telling a story that shows the paradigm in action. Reading a case study, the neophyte sees not only what problems look like, but also what problem-solvers look like. By setting out the problem in such a way as to suggest how to play the role of the problem-solver, the case is in effect socializing the neophyte.

Stewart's statements about case studies in general can also be applied to the case studies that would be included at the ends of chapters of the typical business school textbook. However, these cases vary in one important way from the more general model of case studies in that they always include specific questions that direct the analysis that the (undergraduate) student will do. Thus, in the early stages of socialization, the directive nature of the questions points the student to the specific theory that they need to apply—very little is left to chance.

The case, as part of the textbook, thus carries with it the transcendental voice and therefore the pedagogic authority of the text. In addition, all textbooks come with instructor's resource material, which includes the answers to the questions at the end of the case. Thus, not only does the question direct the student, but also the answers ensure that the lecturer follows the appropriate line of action in her or his discussion of the case.

Within the classroom itself there may be further forms of pedagogic action. One often finds the use of experiential exercises, typically in the form of role-playing and games. In these exercises, students are asked to demonstrate behaviorally their mastery of appropriate management behaviors in the simulated organizational situations in which they are placed. These are often filmed for review, and always critiqued by the instructor and often by fellow classmates. Behavioral errors are highlighted, not only for the individual's learning, but also in order to heighten social learning among all classroom participants.

In addition to behavioral evaluations that occur in experiential exercises, behavioral modeling also takes more subtle forms in business classrooms. Business faculty traditionally come to class wearing "business attire," with haircuts appropriate for the corporate sector, and usually, among male faculty, without facial hair, as would be appropriate in business. Additionally, it is not uncommon for faculty to require students to come to class in "appropriate" business attire on days when the students are scheduled to give in-class presentations.
Films are also heavily used in business school teaching. Often they are commercially produced training films used to reinforce particular points already made in the lecture material. However, faculty in the field of management frequently use popularly released feature films or television shows that can be analyzed in class using the lens of this or that particular theory. The logic of these exercises is that business school theory can be used to analyze anything in life.

There are also a number of forms of pedagogic action in the business school that take place outside the immediate classroom setting. Among these are “outside” speakers from the business community used either on campus or during site visits, where students meet with business “leaders” at their location. In these activities, classroom lessons are validated and extended. Students observe that real live business people actually act and think in ways consistent with portraits in lectures and texts. Additionally, these activities allow the student to observe particular modeled behavior in the “real world.”

Outside speakers and site visits are often orchestrated by student clubs such as Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE), Society for the Advancement of Management (SAM), and the American Marketing Association (AMA). The goals of these clubs are to promote careers in areas under their purview—SIFE for entrepreneurship, SAM for corporate management, and AMA in the areas of marketing and advertising. These clubs also function to bring newer, less experienced students into contact with students more advanced in their program, thus allowing the junior students the opportunity to see what they should be like at the end of their educational process.

Probably the most powerful form of pedagogic action outside of the classroom is the use of internships in the latter part of students’ educational experience. During these internships students spend from 120 to 240 hours gaining “practical firsthand experience of business enterprise” by working in a job for which they receive academic credit. Role-playing of the experiential exercise and the other modeling behaviors is transported to the “real” world of the business organization. In this setting the student’s adeptness to perform appropriate behavioral responses to particular organizational situations is judged, not by a professor but by a member of the business community. As interns, demonstrating that one has inculcated the appropriate habitus not only leads to a grade, but often to an offer of employment. Thus, internship evaluations are often seen as external validations of the internal pedagogic actions.

The various forms of pedagogic action within the business school curriculum can be seen as mechanisms for the inculcation of management habitus within the student population. By the time a student successfully leaves a business school program, he or she is a ready foot soldier for the capitalist enterprise.

THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM IN THE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

In the previous section we reviewed the various forms of pedagogic action used in business school classrooms. The purpose of this pedagogic action is to inculcate business school students with certain cultural arbitraries that benefit the organization in the form of managerial habitus. Now we can examine some specific details of the hidden curriculum that socializes business students:

- Soviet-style centrally planned economies failed; therefore, any economy that is not based upon free market economics will fail. Mainstream economics and business texts teach about economic systems by contrasting the ideal free market with (evil) Soviet-style centrally planned economies. For example, in one of the best-selling introduction to business textbooks, a photograph from China accompanies the discussion of planned economies, which has the following caption:

  “Volunteers” in a planned economy. These students are among the 100,000 recruited by the Chinese government to spruce up the city of Beijing for the 11th Asian games. Though called “volunteers,” the students probably had little choice, and the banners and overseers give the sense that the government is watching (Pride, Hughes, and Kapoor 1993, 22).

The text gloss over the fact that most economies are really mixed. They never offer a serious discussion of northern European welfare-based socialist economies, nor of successful socialist economic enterprises such as the kibbutz.

- Decision making in organizations is the outcome of the application of rational (quantitative) techniques. A substantial portion of the business school curriculum focuses upon the mastery (memorization) of quantitative analysis tools in finance, statistics, economics, and accounting. Throughout the students’ training, professors or texts supply all the necessary information so that the student may
plug in numbers to get the “right” answer. However, simplifying assumptions, issues of imperfect information, or the epistemological/metaphysical issues of these techniques are never discussed. Thus, students come to believe that the application of these techniques in practice is inherently objective and value-free. Articles from critical journals such as Accounting, Organizations and Society are not discussed.

- **Decisions made at the top of the organization use rational and objective procedures.** The prescribed capstone course in the business curriculum is “Strategy and Business Policy.” Each of the available texts for this course starts by describing a process known as “comprehensive strategic planning,” which has its theoretical roots in decision science. Researchers have shown that few if any firms actually practice comprehensive strategic planning, and also that it is a less than effective means of doing strategy. Furthermore, none of the mainstream texts discuss the issues of power and politics that exist during strategy-making, even though the research literature stresses their importance. Why is it taught, then? I contend that it is for the “Wizard of Oz” effect. It is not the overt curriculum that is important but the socialization of lower-status individuals in the organization who will be asked to implement organizational strategy. They will be more effective foot soldiers if they believe that corporate strategy is rational, and “pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.”

- **Unions are illegitimate.** The discussion of labor relations in management or human resource management texts starts with discussion of labor history. After a brief discussion of how workers form unions, the texts devote the rest of the time to discussing “union avoidance” strategies. The messages are subtle, but by the end of their training the typical business student will be avidly antiunion, seeing unions as nothing more than corrupt troublemakers, full of lazy and greedy workers.

- **How to commit murder.** In his essay “Eichmann in the Organization,” Jerry Harvey (1988) examined the implications of Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* for understanding the dynamics of behavior in organizations. He discussed the idea that organizations progressively ask their members to commit “little murders” on the way to an all-out holocaust. I contend that the pedagogy of the business school allows its students to practice these little murders in simulated situations. Throughout schooling, the students are asked to discipline unruly subordinates through the analyses of case studies, role-playing, and experiential exercises. These exercises are structured to put the students in the role of the manager and ask them to exercise their organizational authority. They quickly inculcate a number of beliefs. Probably most important is that in a dispute between a manager and a worker, the worker is always wrong, and the organization is always right. Cases, role-playing, and “experiential exercises” reinforce students’ right to carry out banal acts of evil, and “internships” hold their hands and prepare them for the time that they are asked to do so in the “real world.”

- **Managers and professionals are motivated by intrinsic factors in a job (money is not a motivator).** White-collar workers have careers, not jobs; therefore, “investing” in their current job will have long-term benefits. Most discussions of motivation in the undergraduate curriculum draw on the models of Herzberg and McClelland, who associated motivation with the fulfillment of higher-order needs and the beneficial traits of individuals who score high in a need for achievement. Particularly in the works of McClelland, being “not motivated” becomes equated with being lazy. Thus, those who do a job for the sheer pleasure of seeing it done well become idealized as the norm; deviations from this norm are stigmatized.

Undergraduate students are urged to invest in their careers. A key feature of most business school curricula is the internship “opportunity.” Here the student is assigned to a company in which he or she works at least twenty hours a week under the supervision of both a manager and a faculty member. The student gains “real-world experience” and receives college credit. Most internships are unpaid or low paying and the students pay tuition for the credits they receive. But it “looks good on the resume.”

**DISCUSSION**

Johnson and Gill (1993, 34) argued that for control systems to be effective they must be expressed through the actions and attitudes of individual managers and employees. They must operate as self-controls, which is defined as the controls people exert over their own behavior.
In order for this to happen the norms embodied in administrative or social controls must be “either directly or indirectly . . . internalized by the members of the enterprise and operate as personal controls over attitudes and behaviour.”

A substantial part of the “management” portion of a business student’s training (particularly in the area of organizational behavior) has as its goal the inculcation of a self-view and worldview that benefit the organization. As noted earlier, the essential process of learning to see oneself as different from other elements of the working-class begins in the public schools. The social construction of the blue-collar “other” becomes fully formed at the business school. Students are taught that the difference between them and blue-collar workers (blue-collar work is portrayed as unskilled, assembly-line jobs) is that white-collar work is inherently satisfying because the work itself is interesting and rewarding. It is essential to the inculcation of self-control that white-collar workers are socialized to identify with their job independent of the financial rewards. They are taught, for instance, that because it will be good for their career, they should always be willing to work more hours than they are actually paid for.

The foregoing analysis illustrated some of the cultural arbitraries that the pedagogic action of management “education” instills. I believe that this analysis makes a strong argument for understanding management education as a form of symbolic violence. If education and in particular management education is a form of symbolic violence, then we can only conclude that consent to the labor process under monopoly capitalism is, in fact, established in advance of “playing the game.”

Where does this analysis lead? This is a vexing question for those of us who depend upon appointments in business schools to pay the mortgage. After laying bare the fact that we are the agents in which pedagogic authority has been vested, what can we, as professors and scholars, do to emancipate rather than enslave our students?

Hugh Willmott (1994) suggested transforming the paradigm of management education to one based upon critical action learning. While applauding his approach, I am not optimistic that business schools will, or even could, move in that direction. My analysis indicates that the legitimacy of management education is firmly rooted in serving the interests, as my colleagues often put it, of the business community. In the United States, at least, the common discourse is that business schools have two customers—the students, and the firms that will eventually employ them. To many of my colleagues the second of these is the more important of the two. This being the case, a pedagogy that demystifies the moral and political framework of management practice would lead to a rapid withdrawal of the support that university-based management education currently receives.

As with many other critical pedagogies, the perspective that I offer here will remain marginal to the mainstream of “real” business scholarship. As individuals, we can, of course, act. But doing so will likely be a solitary walk in the wilderness. We can teach our students to “resist well.”6 Teach them of the dark forces at work. So even if they will not be able to avoid playing the game, they will at least know which rules are truly operative. Similarly, we can distinguish between being a professor of management and being a social scientist studying management behavior.7 This approach will probably not make us many friends among our business school colleagues, but perhaps social isolation is a small price to pay for maintaining integrity.

NOTES
1. For the management ramifications of this dilemma, see Edwards (1979).
2. Clearly, the boundaries in the typical public high school are not perfectly seamless, and leakage occurs; but the college-bound do find themselves academically isolated from the general track students. Moreover, the extracurricular activities offered in the typical high school also tend to draw from different social worlds, thereby reinforcing tracking and social segregation.
3. Jenkins (1992, 104) stated, “Symbolic violence, according to Bourdieu, is the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (i.e. culture) upon groups or classes in such a way as they are experienced as legitimate.”
4. At this point, a traditional Marxist would rely on ownership of capital to distinguish the dominant class from the dominated. However, under conditions of late-twentieth-century capitalism I find C. Wright Mills’s (1956) concept of “power elite” to be much more useful, acknowledging the role of both the “older” capitalist class as well as a newer class of individuals who hold positions of power in government in large corporations, but whose social and economic roots may not be from the aforementioned class (see also Schwartz 1987).
5. A habit or unconscious way of dealing with interactions in the world.
6. I take this phrase from my colleague Mike Elmes who talks often of “teaching our students to resist well.”
7. I acknowledge my colleague, Christa Walck, for this idea.