

THE SCHOOL LIBRARY/MEDIA CENTER & CONSTRUCTION OF THE SUBJECT

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There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'the practice of freedom,' the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. Freire, 16

The above quote is from the introduction to Paulo Freire's book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In this quote Richard Shaull summarizes Freire's views on the educational process. Shaull is referring to Freire's concept of "banking education", which is based on a theory of anti-dialog. He explains it is through anti-dialogical education that the logic of the present system is maintained. In banking education the traditional power structure of the teacher student relationship is upheld. The teacher is the one with the knowledge. He or she gives this knowledge to the student and the student receives and stores that information (58-59). The knowledge dispensed is generally of an abstract nature and irrelevant to the real lives of students. Through this process students are alienated from their education and thus objectified (78). Emancipatory education based on "authentic" dialog is Freire's explanation of how to destabilize the hierarchy of teacher over student, so that the teacher is parallel to, rather than above, the student (81). In this sense, education can be a "practice of freedom" in which students are able to transform their world (16).

If education is as Shaull states not a neutral environment, but one that either brings conformity to the present system of logic, or one that provides resources necessary for students to transform their world, then it is important for school librarians to consider their role in providing either an education that ensures the continuance of oppressive relations of production or a "practice of freedom." As computer technology is given the leading role in the resources available for school librarians to teach with, it is vital for school librarians to look critically at how technology functions within the educational system. Although there are many articles that deal with computer technol-

ogy in the school library media center, almost none deal with how computer technology, like Freire's description of educational systems, may contribute to maintaining the present system of logic.

Computer Technology and the Ideological Construction of the Subject

Freire's work shows that above all education and educational practices are not neutral and should not be seen as such. With this in mind it is important to look at how computer technology in the school library media center is also not an indifferent practice. "The 'information' in which the technocized universe trades is not neutral; . . . it imposes its own limited technological range of choices. . ." (Sunfrog 267). Keeping in mind the impossibility of an un-biased education it is crucial to question, as Sunfrog does, what biases are embedded within computer technology. The questions: Does computer technology integrate children into the system of logic of the current relations of production? Does computer technology offer possibilities for a dialogical education? If so is there a hope of changing oppressive relations of production through an educational "practice of freedom"? These questions must be examined within the discourse of the school library/media center literature.

Science as Ideological Authority

To understand how computer technology integrates children into the present system of logic, it is important to understand its descent from science as an authority by which people are integrated into political and social systems. Many theorists agree that technology's descent from science gives it undue authority. As in the earlier example of Freire's teacher as authority, science as a discipline enjoys the same authoritative position. Science as a discipline has for many years had the ability to put forth-unquestioned tellings of how the world works (Koetting 10). Koetting writes in an issue of the journal of Educational Technology, that the articles from that particular issue come from a standpoint of excitement over mid and late twentieth century thinking that disengages from the enchantment of epistemology, metaphysics and empiricism (10). The authors agree that logical empiricism claims objectivity, but "fails neutrality because science in action is a sociopolitical business with sociopolitical aims" (Koetting 5). Robert Muffolletto argues in this issue that, "The belief in science as a way of knowing and acting, and the expert as a source of vision and practice, has dominated education thought and policy" (26). Due to technology's descent from science it enjoys the privilege of being regarded as objective and thus the best way to acquire information about the world. It is the ideology of machine as expert that forces us to question whether a dialogical education is possible with computers. If the machine is the authority, there is an unequal power dynamic. The computer not only has the "right" information, but the computer has the "right" way of doing things. It is in the "right" way of doing things that a dominant

ideology is produced which helps to ensure current power relationships such as the oppressive relations of production.

It is possible to understand how science and technology are seen as authority in the school system. However, the question remains, how does the presence of authority create subjects who maintain current power structures, i.e. relations of production? Theorists such as Donna Haraway have worked with Louis Althusser's theory of ideological reproduction. How is it, he wonders, that so many people follow the rules of society without constantly being threatened physically, even if the rules are not beneficial to many of the members of that society? He argues that this happens through the interpellation of the subject into society due to the production and reproduction of ideology. Althusser describes a citizen walking down the street and a police officer calls out "Hey you, there". As the citizen turns he or she constitutes her/his self as a subject, who is subject to the power of the state that the police officer represents. He further argues that like the combination of ideology and physical threat of the policeman, ideology has the ability to hail subjects into individuals. For Althusser one of the main sites for ideological production is the education system:

It takes children from every class at infant -school age, and then for years, the years in which the child is most 'vulnerable', . . . it drums into them, whether it uses new methods, a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology (French, arithmetic, natural history, the sciences, literature) or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state (ethics, civic instruction, philosophy.) Somewhere around the age of sixteen, a huge mass of children are ejected 'into production': these are the workers or small peasants. Another portion of scholastically adapted youth carries on: and . . . fills the posts of small and middle executives. . . A last portion reaches the summit, the agents of exploitation (capitalist, managers), the agents of repression . . . and the professional ideologist. (Althusser 155).

Students through physical and theoretical educational practices acknowledge themselves as subjects and help to produce and maintain the power structure and logic of their particular society. School is where day after day they learn that straight lines are better, more efficient, and more accepted than curvy lines. They learn to raise their hands and in doing so acknowledge, like the citizen who turns when the police officer calls out, who has the power to let them speak or not let them speak.

Haraway agrees that technology takes the role of the policeman in helping to constitute subjects, insofar as technology is a practice, and an ideological apparatus. She says, "I belong to the 'culture' whose members answer to the 'hey, you'! issuing from technoscience's authoritative practices and discourses" (51). It is possible to see how computer technology can function as an ideological apparatus, as one which from the, "mid-19th century to the

present, [has been] . . . part of a discourse grounded in logical positivism, social control and system management” (Muffoletto 24). Robert Muffoletto points out specifically that the purpose of educational technology has been an ideological one that has, “increase[d] the effectiveness of teaching materials and the efficiency of the learning process” (52). This ideological purpose subscribes to the goals of capitalism, which rely on effective and efficient production of commodities. It is important to go one step further and ask how this ideology of purpose is encoded in practices of, and interaction with technology. In order to attack this question one must ask the sub questions of: What message does computer technology send about the proper order of information and the proper ways of being in the world? What are the rules to being a “good subject”? Since, “texts are hegemonic and are part of a larger discourse encoded with meanings, values, and ideological perspectives on other and self” (Muffoletto 53), interaction with these texts give us feedback on how to be in the world; feedback on what the “right” way is.

These questions can begin to be addressed with a few examples. The word processing program, Microsoft Word has become increasingly invasive in its editing capabilities. MS Word 2000 defaults to underlining grammar and spelling errors in green and red respectively. The clearest way Word 2000’s editing system encourages ideology of a particular form of writing is by highlighting sentences with a high word count. Word 2000’s editing system does not tell you that the sentence is wrong, however, it underlines both that which is grammatically incorrect and that which is “long.” Because, the same mechanism is used to warn writers that they are making a grammatical error as to let them know that they wrote a long sentence an association between long and wrong is made. What does this indicate about the kind of writing that is desirable in post-consumer capitalism?

Underlining errors is disturbing in other respects. It is constant examination. Foucault has argued that as capitalism was developing in the 18th century a new attitude toward work formed that was more conducive to type of efficiency of production which capitalism needs to succeed. This attitude created an experience of work as an ordered and disciplined activity. Discipline of the modern era is brought about by the attention that is paid to the detail and intricacies of what the body does, the “micro-physics of power” (Foucault 189). “Hierarchical Observation” and “The Examination” are two of the instruments of training that work together to help form the disciplined body/subject. “Hierarchical Observation” is the eyes that see without being seen (Foucault 189). Those in power are able to see those with less power and status. The prison guard can see the prisoner at all times. The doctor can view and diagnose the patient. The teacher can watch and examine the student. Those with less power are aware that they can be observed, surveyed at any and all times. The second technique is “The Examination”. During an exam one is generally observed at all times by one with more power than him or her. The exam also produces information about the person being examined that can then be used to further perpetuate and create a “norm.” Groups can

then be ranked in many different ways, in reference to each other by way of gender, race, age, class etc, (Foucault 197).

Whether or not students recognize it when they type, Foucault's principles of creating a disciplined subject are occurring. They are doing something wrong each time they use grammar incorrectly or spell incorrectly and sometimes when they use it correctly, but the computer does not recognize it as such. This can be seen as helping to maintain the systems of oppression when we question which students are likely to have more red and green marks on their screens. What will this do to the self-esteem of already marginalized members of society?

Like the Microsoft Word program that gives immediate feedback on the quality of the students writing, the lessons students learn on computers give the same kind of immediate feedback. Usually lessons are taught through a hypertext program that asks a series of questions that the participant must answer correctly before moving on. Thus students are given immediate feedback on whether they got the question right or wrong. They are constantly being examined and observed. Prior to the heavy use of computer technology students were given feedback, but at a much slower rate. Students then had time to consider what they had done right or wrong and think of solutions to the problem. Now though with immediate feedback this time is taken away from them. Time for free association is limited. In this sense it constantly points out the difference between the individual and the dominant norm.

One can even go so far as to look at the electronic library catalog. Although the catalog is more advanced in terms of the options it offers for searching it takes away from the inclination to browse library shelves. This limits free association because the computer with its undue authority is seen as the best way to approach finding books or other material. It does as Sunfrog asserts "impose[s] its own limited technological range of choices" (Sunfrog 267)

There is much validity to the above readings of technology and computer technology. However, it is through Freire's idea of dialogical education that I think there is the most hope for librarians to develop a critical stance towards computer technology. One must examine the ways in which computer technology in the library media center can be used as subversive to authoritative practices that will not ensure the relations of production. There are many ways in which students use computer technology that implies potential for the destruction of hierarchical methods of teaching. For instance when one negotiates the Internet they are often moving across hypertext, which does not necessarily have an order that is hierarchical. It cannot be denied that the computer is a source for creativity. Another advantage to using the Internet in the school library media center is that the Internet is a wealth of diversity of information. The amount of information that is available on the Internet versus is vaster compared to what any school collection can have. Chat rooms offer potential for social action. Students can communicate

much further distances and more quickly on line. In anarchist movements computers have at times proven to be a successful tool. For instance in the Zapatista movement in Mexico the Internet allowed them to send their communiqués to the rest of the world (Atton 230). In spite of Haraway's caution of technoscience's ability to hail its subjects into existence she also gives hope by saying, "Subjects in a discourse can and do refigure its terms, contents and reach (50). This statement is a powerful one for the implications it gives to restructuring technology and the discourse of computer technology in the school library media center so that the authoritative practices of technology can be reconstituted.

Rewriting the Ideology of Technological Practices

The last issue of this paper is to question what librarians can do in their interactions and teachings of and with computer technology to participate in emancipatory, dialogical education so that systems of oppression are not maintained. The first step begins with the librarian. Librarians must begin to recognize their role in the education system and acknowledge the non-neutrality of that system. Librarians must literally be willing to enter into dialog with students about the context and purpose of their education system at large. A physical act librarians can do, depending on school policy, is to disable the automatic spell check and grammar checks on computers, or at least let students know that they can turn them off and depending on the age group let them know why they might want to.

An important way librarians can participate in re-writing the practices of technology is to participate in the professional discourse of technology in the school library media center in an untechnocratic style. Currently, school library and media literature has numerous articles concerned with the increased use of computer technology in the school library media center. The bulk of these articles are concerned with how to put this technology to more efficient use so that students will become "information literate". Subsidiary to that are articles concerned with the change that might occur in the librarian's role, and ethical use of the Internet (McCauley, Jacobson and Smith). These are important topics in the literature, however there are problems with the current discussion of computer technology. First, there is a lack of discussions that deal critically with ideology produced through interactions with computers. Secondly, these articles tend to participate in what Fred Lemke calls technocratic discourse. Technocratic discourse is a way of writing in which grammar and choice of words function so that the subject is seen as an objective fact in the universe (64). This style of writing, is laden with political ideology that appears to be objective. Donna Haraway argues that the discourse of technoscience is intertwined with promises of salvation, "freedom, the free world, democracy and . . . the free market" (94). With Lemke's framework it is possible to question how particular phrases and words in the literature of computer technology in the school media center function. For instance, one can examine catch phrases such as, "Informa-

tion Literacy” and “Information Society” and ask, what specific society do these phrases refer to? Are we to believe that “information” is new? Does “Information Society” refer to this specific time? Does “information” differentiate then from now? The difference is not that we have information now, and that we did not then. The change or difference is that our relationship to information has changed. Now we exchange information/data for money in a way that used to be dominated by exchange of tangible commodities. What is being referred to by the term “Information Society”, is a change in the market. “Information Literacy” can be seen, as the skill needed to make money in, and maintain this new market. Along with the use and invention of terms such as, “Information Society” and “Information Literacy” many hours of thought have gone into producing outlines of standards and goals for information literacy by different institutions (Ark 11). Encoded into these guidelines are technocratic messages about how students ought to be, in order for progress and values of capitalism to be upheld. One of the goals for Bloom’s Taxonomy of Critical Thinking Skills is “readiness”, one from ALA standards is “appreciation”, two from the U.S. National Educational Goals are “excellence” and “chemical free”. At first glance these seem like reasonable goals for students to have when approaching learning with technology, however one must take a closer look and examine the dominant ideology that is applicable to the continuance and maintenance of the present system of the production of goods. These terms are loaded with value about how the right way to be is. After looking at the complete versions of the above standards for information literacy not one of the goals is to teach students to question sources, or to be highly skeptical of the messages about dominate culture and dominate relations of production that are prevalent in the ideology of the use of computer technology. This gap in school library literature of not questioning is specific to school library literature. Other fields which technology is integral, such as Educational Technology, Education, and Librarianship have a lively discourse of critical approaches to the use of computer technology. As school librarians title changes from “School Librarian” to “School Library Media Specialist” it is crucial for school librarians to join this discourse and not claim neutrality in the educational process.

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