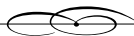~

Ideology and Education

In *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories: Modern Tales for Our Life & Times*, Garner (1994) introduces the volume by saying that his purpose in retelling traditional European fairy tales with a modern multicultural sensibility is to "rethink . . . 'classic' stories so they reflect more enlightened times" (p. ix). We read this statement as ironic. Rather than embracing "more enlightened" contemporary values, he is being satiric: His intent is to critique what he feels to be the incursion of politics and ideologies on the traditions (including stories) through which Western values have been instilled. In Garner's retelling of "Little Red Riding Hood," for instance, the wolf tells Little Red Riding Hood that it's unsafe for a little girl to be walking through the woods alone. She replies, "I find your sexist remark to be offensive in the extreme, but I will ignore it because of your traditional status as an outcast from society, the stress of which has caused you to develop your own, entirely valid, worldview." Ho ho, say readers who feel embattled during an era in which their traditional values are being questioned by those historically excluded from privilege; how cleverly the author lampoons the stance and language of these groups whose agendas threaten our cherished way of life.

Garner (1994) and others who share his sentiments believe that those who seek greater inclusion, whose perspective they describe with the pejorative term political correctness, have brought ideology into arenas that have been previously untainted. They overlook, however, the ways in which unchallenged dominant worldviews—typically their own—can become so normalized that they become invisible to the oppressor and often to the oppressed.

In recent years educational researchers have increasingly worked to make the ideologies—the integrated premises and goals that make up a sociopolitical perspective—that affect teaching and learning more visible and thus open to analysis and discussion. For example, those who advocate New Literacy studies have particularly emphasized the role of ideology in educational practice. Street (1984) argues that literacy practice is inherently ideological given that people become literate through engagement with significant social others. Literacy practice is therefore a central aspect of the social order, which is maintained in large part by the

degrees to which participants know and reproduce its features. Literacy's meaning is sanctioned by the social institutions in which it is practiced, thus making literacy inherently political and ideological.

To Gee (1990), ideologies are revealed through Discourses, which he defines as "a combination of saying the right sorts of things in the right way, while engaging in the right sorts of actions and interactions, and appearing to think and feel the right way and have the right sorts of values" (p. xv). Undoubtedly this focus on acting in the right way is behind the notion of political *correctness* that threatens so many cultural traditionalists, the twist being that they believe that only their critics follow an orthodoxy. Gee argues that rather than adhering to a universal standard as envisioned by cultural traditionalists, Discourse is always local and practiced by those who share a distinct political perspective. A local Discourse "integrates words, actions, interactions, values, feelings, attitudes, and thinking in specific and distinctive ways [that are] connected to a particular social group's way of being in the world, their 'form of life,' their very identity, who they take themselves to be" (p. xvii). A Discourse is learned through social practice, with the governing rules rarely explicit yet mediating and shaping social interaction and revealing who is and is not a member of the social group so engaged. Those who generalize their own social practices and Discourses as broad social norms find the worldviews and Discourses of others to be political,

agenda-driven, and threatening to what they believe to be the natural social order.

Educators who claim any of the various "post" perspectives similarly share an interest in the role of power in social relationships. Solsken (1993), for instance, characterizes *poststructuralism* as a set of perspectives involving "stances toward knowledge, power, and society that call into question the foundations of knowledge claims in all paradigms" (p. 319). She proceeds to identify the following assumptions that define a poststructuralist perspective:

1. Knowledge and meaning are always socially constructed interpretation and practice, not the discovery of structure in the world or the emergence of natural structures of the mind. Language (spoken or written), whatever its biological base, is constructed and used in social practices that are culturally defined within various "discourses" or ideological frameworks.

2. Knowledge and meaning are always historical. By historical, we mean that knowledge and meaning are crucially located and embedded in the complex and particular dynamics of the moment as those emerge from the moments that have preceded it.

3. Knowledge and meaning are always partial. Here we intend partial to be taken in the sense of "incomplete," not just "in progress" but inherently "uncompletable." The incompleteness of knowledge results, in part, from the fact that it is historically situated.

4. Knowledge and meaning are always multiple, in that they differ not only across groups, individuals, and situations, but within them as well. Thus knowl-

edge and meaning are not internally consistent but inherently unstable.

5. Knowledge and meaning are always political, even in the practices of everyday life. Because social dynamics always involve relations of power, knowledge and meaning are partial in the sense of "biased toward particular interests." (p. 319)

The premise that knowledge and meaning are always socially constructed, historical, partial, multiple, and political suggests that knowledge and meaning are always ideological, as are the texts, processes, and social transactions through which they are negotiated. The ideological nature of social life is realized, as Solsken (1993) notes, in all aspects of life from the most mundane and informal to the most highly institutionalized.

This issue of *RTE* features two articles in which researchers interrogate presumed norms, thus serving as contemporary treatises on ideology and education. Using lenses of different magnification, each author looks at school-based literacy practices in such a way as to reveal the ideologies that motivate and sustain them.

Taking a broad view, Joel Taxel examines the ways in which the children's literature industry makes decisions about what books to publish. He produces this critique through his postulation of a political economy of the children's literature publishing industry. Taxel considers the effects of *fast capitalism*—the phenomenon of producing goods and services at ever increasing speeds—to examine the ways in which economic consolidation has produced an increasingly monolithic publishing industry dominated by the corporate perspective of a small group of companies. Situated within the economic interests of these vast enterprises, decisions about which children's literature to publish are constrained by a book's potential as a brand name commodity that may be marketed in conjunction with subsidiary products such as licensed characters, spin-off films, sequels, and other goods with ongoing commercial value. Taxel argues that under such circumstances, products that might appeal to less robust segments of the economy, such as multicultural literature, are less likely to be developed, encouraged, produced, and promoted than are books with more mainstream commercial value. Taxel offers this analysis as a way to raise awareness of the extent to which democratic principles are compromised when decision-making about which books become available to the public are concentrated in the interests of relatively few people whose ideology is motivated by a book's perceived potential to contribute to the corporation's financial growth.

Kevin M. Leander moves the analytic lens in much further, focusing on a single classroom episode in an 11th-grade English class. One class member, an African American girl named Latanya, was constructed by the other participants as being "ghetto." Taking into account what he calls *multiple identity artifacts*—a classroom banner, stereotypical characterizations of "the black community," representations of home geographies, etc.—Leander analyzes

how student identities are constructed and sustained within social norms. Student identities, then, may be constructed by others against an ideological tapestry that can be hegemonic, discriminatory, and socially unjust. Furthermore, these constructions can agitate interactions in which constructed identities are reproduced within the social space provided for students. Students can thus become positioned in ways that are difficult to challenge, often in ways that perpetuate historical roles and relationships. Leander shows how students who enter school from backgrounds in which they develop identities that are on the margins of what is socially acceptable for school performances often find their outsider status reinforced through classroom transactions.

These studies contribute to a growing body of scholarship that reveals the ways in which ideology affects students' potential for learning. If the book industry makes texts available that institutionalize the perspective of a society's dominant culture—the most prosperous group and therefore the group most likely to drive the industry's economy—then students outside that culture may be depicted and otherwise constructed as deviating from the norm and performing according to a lower standard. If classroom norms enable students from the school's dominant culture to impose their expectations on those who are not, then they may both contribute to identities that position students as outsiders and promote behaviors that reinforce that status.

We do not expect all classrooms to be free of domination or the ideologies that motivate repression and resistance. As Lensmire (1997), Lewis (1997), and others have shown, even pedagogies designed to be liberating can open spaces in which students construct new and inequitable relationships of power. We hope, however, that the studies in this issue of *RTE* both help to reveal at least some of the ways in which ideology is implicated in what and how students learn in school and help raise awareness of how educators can help recognize inequities and think of ways to reduce them.

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