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Social Structure and Pedagogy

Introduction

In classroom research, it is often maintained that culture (i.e. the enveloping social structure) has an effect not only on what is taught in schools but also on how it is taught. For example, researchers have attributed classroom practices to the social structure in which such practices occur (e.g. Yoder and Mautle 1991; Harber 1994; Cleghorn et al. 1989; Fuller and Clarke 1996; Vavrus 2009). It is often stated as an article of faith that the 'oppressive' African culture contributes heavily to the substance and resilience of the teacher-centred pedagogy. Often lacking, however, is an articulation of how exactly the social structure finds its way into the classroom. For example, in the Botswana context, Prophet (1990:114) observes that:

.... no research appears to have been carried out concerning the extent to which fundamental world-views of Setswana culture reinforce or contradict the views being put forward in schooling.

He goes on to make this pertinent observation:

.... the quality of learning in the classroom here in Botswana may not be drastically improved by curriculum reform which simply alters the surface features of that which is on offer to the pupils.... The problem is more fundamental and is related to the issues of culture and language (p. 116).

It is clear that at the time of writing these words, Prophet may not have been aware of the anthropological work done by Alverson (1978) which demonstrates the relationship between Tswana child-rearing practices and didactic teaching practices. This oversight notwithstanding, Prophet's observations were apposite in that they demonstrated an awareness of the social/cultural groundedness of

teaching and learning – a position that negates technical rationality and all that it stands for. What Prophet is calling for in the statements cited above is the linking of the macro (structural features) and the micro (classroom practice), in particular the following three aspects: the enveloping social structure, education as the transmission of culture, and pedagogical practices in the classroom.

In this chapter I examine aspects of the African social structure, child-rearing practices and pedagogical practice. Salient aspects of social structure are the structures of domination and subordination which govern interpersonal relations and practices in the African context. Child rearing in Africa generally emphasizes the domination and subordination of the child. During both overt and covert socialization, children internalize these structures as their subjective reality which in turn informs their habits of thought and positively orients them towards their society's authority structures. The habits of thought thus engendered are perfectly congruent with the prevailing traditional social structure and are, therefore, essential for the perpetuation and reproduction of the latter. Agents (e.g. teachers and students) who are products of more or less the same objective conditions will tend to share a commonsense world as well as harmonized and homogenized actions and practices. The mode of thought produced through the internalization of these objective conditions is what students and teachers carry to the school situation as their 'cultural baggage'. Teachers and students do not leave this baggage at the school gate. Being part of their 'unconscious' (Bourdieu 1971), they take it with them into the classroom where, through the mediation of pedagogical style, it influences their classroom practices and actions. Viewed in this way, teaching ceases to be a neutral activity that is dislocated from its broader social context (Flanagan 1992). Freire (1972) has argued that education is never a value-neutral activity; it either functions as an instrument for integrating the young into the logic of the present so that they conform to it, or it becomes the practice of freedom. Research on classroom processes in sub-Saharan Africa, as indicated in the previous chapters, clearly shows that education there serves to integrate students into the existing paternalistic social structure, a point emphasized by Harber (1994).

Taking the cosmology of the Tswana of southern Africa as an example, I demonstrate the relationship between the social structure and classroom practices. The reader is encouraged to relate my rendition to their own context as a way of establishing how their own culture interacts with education. I begin by a brief consideration of Bourdieu's thinking on education as a social institution and its role in the transmission of culture. Such explication is necessary if we are to appreciate how schools in the African context and

elsewhere for that matter, produce and reproduce the social structure that in the first place shaped them. This will be followed by a consideration of how structures of domination and subordination found in many African contexts are engendered and how ultimately they become part of the consciousness of those inhabiting the structures. It is these structures that the education system reproduces and it is the pedagogical style that connects the school to the enveloping social structure.

Bourdieu on Education and Cultural Transmission

Sociologists (such as Berger and Pullberg 1966; Berger and Luckmann 1967) maintain that we are all born into social structures that predate us and that the whole process of 'becoming', by definition, implies the gradual internalization of the social structure in which one is born. It is only through internalization that one becomes a member of their society, that is, it is only when objective reality has been internalized that we may talk of one as possessing a 'habit of thought' or mode of thinking which is at the basis of their actions and behaviour. Objective structures differ from one society to another and even within the same society, leading to variations in cultural practices. Berger (1963:133) has observed that:

Each society can be viewed in terms of its social structure and its socio-psychological mechanisms, and also in terms of the world view that serves as the common universe inhabited by its members. World views vary socially, from one society to another and within different segments of the same society. It is in this sense that one says that a Chinese "lives in a different world" from that of a Westerner.

Internalization of the social structure is a function given to the institutions of the family and education system in most societies. It is through the family that the child acquires its 'formative' identity. The school, in later years, shares this responsibility with the family when the child has to spend more than eight hours in each week day away from home, or in the case of secondary education, ten months away in a boarding school. Thus the power of these institutions to shape the identity of the child in many societies cannot be compared to any other institution. Bourdieu (1977:87) captures the mutuality of the family and school when he observes that the disposition 'acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences (in particular the reception and assimilation of the specifically pedagogic message)...'

Through their socialisation function these institutions are heavily implicated in the production and reproduction of the enveloping social structure. For these institutions to carry out this function an 'affinity must exist between the

cognitive style [what Bourdieu terms “habit of thought”] of the society and the pedagogical style employed in the schools’ (Farquharson 1990: 4). That is, if schools are to effectively mould individuals into desired members of society the pedagogical style used in the schools must be instrumental to the social structure in which the school is located.

Although social structures predate us, they are social constructions in that they are constructed by humans and are essential for human existence (Berger and Luckmann 1967), which means that they have to be maintained and legitimated so as to ensure their continuity and reproduction. In their daily activities, human beings construct society, or more specifically, social structures. As Berger and Pullberg (1966:63) point out, ‘Any specific social structure exists only insofar as human beings realize it as part of their world’. Social structures, therefore, have no reality without a human one. A dialectical perspective of social constructions contends that these, through time, tend to assume an independent, objective existence and appear to constrain human actions. That is, social reality becomes objectified and a constraint on action. Structures in this sense then can be defined as ‘ideologically based social relationships expressed in an objectivised form’ (Giroux 1980:241). For Giddens (1976) structures are series of reproduced practices. The task of sociological theorizing, according to Giddens, is to explain how structures are constituted through action and reciprocally, how action is constituted structurally. Berger and Pullberg (1966:57) put this task of sociological theorizing in a question form: ‘How is it possible that subjectively intended meanings become objective facticities?’ I do not intend answering this question here; it has been competently addressed by others (see Berger and Luckmann 1967). My interest is in understanding how, once constructed, social structures are maintained and legitimated. Education, being one of the legitimating processes of the social structure, has to function in ways instrumental to the existence of the latter.

Bourdieu argues that the content of the curriculum and the pedagogical style of an education system are determined by the cultural apparatus of which they are part. Farquharson (1990) makes the same point when he states that we can only understand the nature of pedagogical styles by reference to the particular society within which they find expression. In short, teaching methods have social and cultural origins; they are contextual. Bourdieu (1971) attributes the acquisition of a whole system of perception and thought which individuals use in making sense of their society to formal education. Thus, schooling implicitly defines and transmits a culturally-valued ‘habit of thought’ which Bourdieu (1971) defines as a ‘set of basic, deeply interiorized master-patterns’ (pp. 192-3)

on the basis of which individuals subsequently acquire other patterns. Bourdieu describes culture as a common code that enables all individuals possessing that code to attach the same meaning to the same words and to the same type of behavior. Culture is a 'common set of previously assimilated master-patterns from which an infinite number of individual patterns directly applicable to specific situations are generated' (Bourdieu 1971:192). To emphasise the socialization role of the school, Bourdieu states that its function is:

consciously (and also, in part, unconsciously) to transmit the unconscious or, to be more precise, to produce individuals equipped with the system of unconscious (or deeply buried) master-patterns that constitute their culture (Bourdieu 1971:194).

The cultural code has two basic elements: a master-pattern (which is closely related to the concept of 'background' as described in the previous chapter) and 'patterns of invention and improvisation' (which is related to the concept of 'foreground') (Bourdieu 1971:192). The relationship between these two elements is a dialectical one, meaning that culture is dynamic. The 'master-pattern' ensures stability and constancy of practices while the 'foreground' permits innovation and improvisation. That is, the existence of the background and foreground is what is responsible for cultural/historical change:

History culminates in an ongoing and seamless series of moments, and is continuously carried forward in a process of production and reproduction in the practices of everyday life (Jenkins 1992:80)

Through exposure to the education system, the master-pattern becomes deeply internalized as the cognitive style or habit of thought (Farquharson 1990). The master-pattern organizes, for the individual, 'a marked-out area covered with compulsory turnings and one-way streets, avenues and blind alleys' (Bourdieu 1971:196), thus setting limits to what is thinkable and do-able. With limits set by the master-pattern on consciousness and actions, the individual's ability to innovate is likewise constrained. Radical change, because it tends to threaten the stability of the master-pattern, usually is not welcome. For example, innovations that seem to question the teacher's and students' taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching and learning are likely to face tissue rejection.

If education is involved in the transmission and internalization of a society's habit of thought that is reflective of, and instrumental to the continued existence of the social structure, it is therefore also an agent of the legitimation of the existing social order and its relations of power. Bourdieu (1973:83) states that 'the education system fulfils a function of legitimation which is more necessary to the perpetuation of the social order'. Since it is the 'most effective means

of perpetuating the existing social pattern' (Bourdieu 1974:32), education essentially has a conservative function. In this sense, schools are instrumental in maintaining the status quo. If schools are to mould individuals effectively into desired members of society, the pedagogical style used in them must be instrumental to the reproduction of the social structure in which the school is located. Thus, it would be expected that a society that emphasizes structures of domination and subordination of the child in its child-rearing practices would tend to employ a pedagogical style in the schools that is instrumental to the perpetuation of such structures. This position is summarized by Freire (1972:152) in the following words:

... a rigid and oppressive social structure necessarily influences the institutions of child-rearing and education within that structure. These institutions pattern their action after the style of the structure, and transmit the myths of the latter. Homes and schools (from nurseries to universities) exist not in abstract, but in time and space.

Bourdieu's explication of the education-society relationship is significant in two ways. First, it demonstrates that the relationship is a symbiotic one in that both education and society, through mediation by the pedagogical style, constitute one another. Secondly, it helps us appreciate the social/cultural embeddedness of pedagogical styles such as teacher-centred and learner-centred pedagogies. Social structures function as support systems for these pedagogies, and the same social structures only allow for the production and reproduction of those classroom practices that are pre-adapted to the same social structures. In other words, social structures set limits to pedagogical change. Thus, reasons for failure to shift teachers' and students' classroom practices from teacher-centredness to learner-centredness for example, should be sought not only from technical factors (such as lack of resources and time, large student-teacher ratios, and poorly trained teachers), but also from the surrounding social structures (Farquharson 1990).

How, then, can this framework help us understand not only the social/cultural genesis of the teacher-centred pedagogy in the African context, but also its resilience? This is the question we attempt to answer in the remaining sections of this chapter. I borrow heavily from Alverson's (1978) anthropological study of the Tswana of southern Africa to illustrate how the social structures of domination and subordination find their way into African classrooms. Alverson attributes these structures to Tswana cosmology which is not markedly different from what other scholars (e.g. Mbiti 1969) have said about African cosmology in general.

Tswana Cosmology as a Variant of African Cosmology

This section begins with a note of caution – what follows should not be read to mean that Tswana society is static and homogeneous; far from it. In addition to changes due to its own internal dynamics, Tswana society has changed as a result of increasing contact with other cultures. This has affected its internal structures. Africa's long colonial history ensured adoption/adaption of institutional structures and values of modern, structurally differentiated societies of the West. Thus Tswana values exist side-by-side with imported Western values. This has profoundly altered traditional structures such as child rearing. However, this should not be read to mean that the habit of thought engendered by earlier 'traditional' social structures has also been profoundly changed. There is no one-to-one correspondence between social structures and habits of thought. Indigenous values, practices or generally, ways of doing things are known to have resisted powerful forces of urbanization, education and industrialization, forces that have obliterated social structures in some instances. For example, 'revolutions' such as the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century which ushered in modern science, profoundly changed social structures but took centuries to shake habits of thought. Butterfield (1949) contends that although modern science overthrew the ancient world and the Middle Ages and replaced them by a new world view, this was just the beginning of a process which was to take hundreds of years, and is not complete even now. He explains this resilience of the 'old' world view in this way:

Our [the West's] Graeco-Roman roots and Christian heritage were so profound – so central to our thinking – that it has required centuries of pulls and pressures, and almost a conflict of civilizations in our midst, to make clear that the centre had long ago shifted (Butterfield 1949:189)

Thus, the introduction of new structures to replace existing ones does not necessarily change profoundly the way people in a society think or do things. These established ways of doing things have evolved over hundreds of years and it may take as many years to change them. In the same vein, although colonialism and other forces of modernity have altered structural features of Tswana society, some have remained relatively stable, for example, structures of child domination and subordination. However, even these are being altered as a result of increased differentiation within Tswana society engendered by forces of urbanisation and formal education, leading in some segments of society to more democratic child-rearing practices. For example, we see increasing differentiation along social class lines, meaning that socialization

practices will tend to differ from one social class to the other, leading to variations in habits of thought. This is so because – and this is a general rule of thumb – individuals occupying the same positions within the social world will tend to share a world view. In a differentiated society, therefore, people will tend to differ in their habits of thought according to their social class. As DiMaggio (1979:1464) puts it:

To the extent that members of different social classes differ in the nature of their primary socialization.... each class has its own characteristics [habit of thought] with individual variations.

That said, we must always bear in mind that individual and class habits of thought are but structural variants of the collective habit of thought which acts as the ‘canopy’ of society, giving rise to a structure plausible to all individuals well-integrated into society. Thus, although contemporary Tswana society may be characterised by segmentation (in terms of rural-urban areas, social class, etc.) there are nevertheless ‘overarching reality definitions’ (Berger et al. 1974:21) which hold the whole society together and give its members a shared frame of reference. It is precisely this frame of reference which maintains institutional order. The kinship system is one such overarching structure in Tswana society, and is underpinned by the principles of lineage membership, sex and age. In the socialization of children, age and sex have always served as common denominators, not just among the Tswana, but among Bantu-speaking people in general. Age, however, cuts across all other positional factors such as gender, ethnicity, social class and so forth (for a superb discussion of socialization on the basis of gender in Tswana society, see Mafela 1993; Alverson 1978 and Schapera 1941). One cannot overemphasise the centrality of the principle of age in Tswana socialization. Without a clear conceptualization of this principle, particularly its intersection with the Tswana conception of time, it is doubtful if socialization practices of the Tswana can be understood. The intersection is critical in that it leads to social hierarchy based on age which in turn structures socialization practices.

The Tswana Conception of Age and Time: The determinate Intersection

At the centre of Alverson’s rendition of Tswana cosmology is the factor of ‘age’. Great emphasis in Tswana society is put on kinship as the basis on which political, judicial, economic and religious aspects of society are organised (Alverson 1978: 12). Embedded in the kinship concept are three important principles for recruitment to social roles. These are sex, age of the individual relative to that of another (senior versus junior), and lineage membership. Of

the three, age is the most relevant to our study and shall later be considered in more detail. It will be demonstrated that the structures of domination and subordination in Tswana, and indeed in African society in general, emanate directly from the social importance accorded to age. Suffice it to say at this stage that age has been recognised by anthropologists such as Alverson and Schapera as one of the important ranking criteria in Tswana society. In this regard, Alverson observes that in Tswana society 'any senior of the same sex is one's superior and any junior of the same sex one's subordinate' (1978:13). Traditionally, ranking by age was elaborated in a system of age-sets or age-regiments. These are common amongst almost all Bantu-speaking people of southern Africa. Bray et al. (1986) also observe that age-sets are pervasive in Africa in general. Age-sets amongst the Tswana were based upon tribe-wide groupings of men and women who came to maturity at about the same time. They remained in their age-regiments throughout their lives. They remained deferential towards age-sets of their seniors and expected the same from junior age-sets. Already we can see that Tswana social hierarchy and interpersonal relations have always been regulated by a rigid, paternalistic structure, and this same authority structure pervaded traditional education which was, to say the least, training in conformity.

Age and ageing cannot be adequately conceptualised if their temporal dimension is ignored. It is essential to grasp the intersection of age and time and, how it, in the context of the Tswana, influences their child-rearing practices. This is because for the Tswana, ageing is not just the mere progression of the biological being through universal linear time.

Mbiti (1969:21) observes that the 'linear concept of time in Western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite future, is practically foreign to African thinking'. Traditionally, time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present, and virtually no future. Taking off from this basic premise, Alverson (1978:170) also characterises Tswana time as two dimensional, comprising what he terms 'existing time' and 'cosmologic time'. The two conceptions of time are co-ordinated and are essential for our understanding of Tswana 'lived time', that is, age and ageing. Alverson describes 'cosmologic time' as progressive, atemporal and eternally present. The Tswana believe that the 'cosmos' had a beginning and that beginning continues throughout cosmologic time, hence it is always present. Existing time, on the other hand, has two aspects; world time and ancestral time, and it is a union of the two, with world time being finite. For the Tswana therefore, age and ageing cannot be conceived of as the progression through the linear

and homogeneous time of the Western world. Age for the Tswana, Alverson (1978:170) argues, has its basis 'in a set of social and ancestral relationships'. Social order in this sense is in both the world of the living and of the dead, the latter being closest to the origins of society. Age is one's relation to this social order. Ageing, defined as a movement towards death, is simultaneously a movement towards the origins of society, a movement towards the beginning. In this sense, an individual's age is defined in terms of their nearness to the ancestors.

Inextricably linked to age is the accumulation of experience. The amount of experience one accumulates is directly dependent on one's age. Experience in this context is the depth of one's knowledge of the past, towards which the future is moving. As Alverson (1978) puts it:

... for the Tswana aging is a simultaneous movement in two directions from the centre: to a primordial past which is the goal of the future and to the end of one's future, which is defined in terms of experience accumulated while alive (p. 170).

In Tswana cosmology, both children (because of their recent arrival from the world of the ancestors) and the very old are spiritually closest to the ancestors, 'to the final order' which is also the beginning of their society. Now, this brings us to the significance of growth. Growth of the biological being from childhood has the adverse effect of cutting it off from its closeness to the ancestors. However, continued growth to old age increases the individual's closeness to the ancestors, that is, to the past which is also the beginning. It is precisely this understanding of 'growth' that structures the child-adult relationship among the Tswana. Although the child and the old share their closeness to the final order, the latter has an edge over the former; the child's closeness to the origins of society is only defined in terms of its recent 'arrival' from the world of ancestors, whereas the old man/woman is wise both because (s)he is growing closer to the ancestors, and because during his/her occupation of a position in the world, (s)he has accumulated knowledge through experience compared to the child. This puts the child in an inherently subordinate position vis-à-vis the adult. Practically, the child may never accumulate as much knowledge as the elders in the whole of its life. For this reason, the child must always learn from the elders. This must be so because for the Tswana 'knowledge' is *'remembering things past'* (Alverson 1978:171), and compared to their elders, children have little to remember.

Tswana understanding of life is that it is not a 'race against time'. Living is an accumulation of time and engenders wisdom which is equated to knowledge. The more time one accumulates, that is, the longer one lives,

the wiser a person is considered to be. Ageing, therefore, is synonymous with increased wisdom. For this reason, it is not surprising that the oldest in Tswana society are normally the most influential and command great respect. Their experience/knowledge is supposedly deep because it has been accumulated over a long period of time. On the contrary, children have a shorter past and, therefore, a shallower life experience compared to the elders because they have not accumulated as much time. As a direct result of this, the Tswana in general feel that there is very little of value that an elder can learn from his/her junior.

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that age and time intersect in determinate ways. The subordinate status of children means that the Tswana regard them as a 'deficit system', to use Esland's (1971:89) terminology. One must emphasise that this subordinate status of children in Tswana society is not only in relation to their elders, but is also in relation to knowledge. The child, therefore, has no capacity to constitute the world and must be initiated into it by 'knowledgeable' elders. Thus, Tswana society emphasises structures of domination and subordination of the child both to the elders and to knowledge. Children are exposed to these authority structures quite early in their lives. These structures of domination and subordination are internalised by children during primary socialisation as their subjective reality, giving rise to a form of consciousness we may term the 'dependent' mode of thinking. This mode of thinking is compatible with Tswana social structure and is essential for the latter's continuity, maintenance and reproduction. It is this mode of thinking that children take with them into classroom as their cultural baggage; it helps structure classroom social relations.

Tswana children are brought up in a way that respects age and its many prerogatives. Children are taught that obedience to and respect for the elders is very important. It is for this reason that Alverson (1978:68) has described Tswana child rearing as 'training in deference'. Child rearing in Tswana culture involves instruction in matters of 'propriety, morality and character'. The emphasis is on self control, respect for others, obedience to elders, courtesy and generosity. As Alverson (1978:68) observes of Tswana culture; '[m]uch of child training consists in imparting the etiquette that an older individual (doing the instruction) feels should govern how a junior person acts toward a senior person.'

Children are expected to learn and appreciate their responsibilities towards their seniors. The Tswana are known to be '... rigid and authoritarian disciplinarians who enjoy teaching legalistic dos and don'ts in manners of public decorum, etiquette and role obligations' (Alverson 1978:68). Children are

taught from an early age values and attitudes related to collectivism (which is related to the extended family) and submission to authority. Even Western-educated prominent African personalities have expressed the social valuation of collectivism and ascriptive authority. Jomo Kenyatta, the late President of Kenya, expressed this view five decades ago: 'To the European, individuality is the ideal of life, to the Africans, the ideal is the right relations with, and behaviour to, other people' (Kenyatta 1961:122).

This is the sort of culture Tswana children are inducted into during primary socialisation. It constitutes their objective, taken-for-granted world. The socialisation practices engendered by such a world ensure its continuity and reproduction. As a way of legitimising this social world, a whole universe of ritual practices, discourses, sayings, stories, maxims and proverbs is employed to make sure that the child does not stray away from the socially-patterned form of behaviour. A well-socialised Tswana child, therefore, is expected to obey legitimate instructions and requests, to follow the '*canons of decorum and etiquette*', and to have learnt the duties and rights of one's station in life (Alverson 1978:69). All these customs and practices go a long way in teaching young children who they are and what their limited rights are before they enter the classroom (Kay 1975; Apple 1990). Before the child enters the first year of primary school, these values have been firmly impressed in the mind. The practices help the child establish a frame of reference by which to approach systems s/he will later encounter, and this includes the classroom as a system.

Tswana Child-rearing Practices and Formal Education: The link

An important offshoot of Tswana child-rearing practices is the rigid, domineering and one-sided child-adult relationship. Such a relationship, Freire (1972) argues, usually reflects the objective cultural conditions of the surrounding social structure which penetrate the home environment. He goes on to argue that the home atmosphere is carried over to the school 'where the students soon discover that (as in the home) in order to achieve some satisfaction they must adapt to the precepts which have been set from above' (Freire 1972:153). Students come to 'fear freedom', to 'learn not to think', thus reinforcing their cultural image of a deficit system or empty vessels. When these young people become professionals (e.g. teachers) they will tend to reproduce the rigid patterns in which they were educated. In this way, the dominant authority structure is legitimated and the culture of dependency on the part of the students augmented, with the resultant effect of reinforcing the teachers' social roles as authorities. The end result, once again, is the cultural reproduction of authoritarian teaching practices.

Alverson (1978) discerns a direct link between Tswana child-rearing practices and formal education in Botswana. He sees formal education in Botswana as a perfect analogue of Tswana patterns of child rearing. The learner learns by rote and is punished for errors, mistakes and general incompetence. Teachers clearly see themselves as figures of authority. Alverson (1978:69) observes that in Botswana:

There is no conception, like that currently in vogue in the Anglo-Saxon world, of developing “the whole personality” by means of self-discovery . . . of rewarding exploratory or innovative behaviour even if it is absurd to the adults.

To be innovative and critical is actively discouraged by the rote learning approach. Spontaneity, creativity, self-reliance and autonomy are stifled. A good student must show docility, obedience and submissiveness towards his/ her teacher. It is significant to note how this resonates with educational thinking in nineteenth century Europe, although as we saw in Chapter Three, there such education was aimed at ‘civilising’ the ‘depraved’ working class children.

In a different study, Alverson (1977) claims to have heard American Peace Corp Volunteers (PCV) complaining about the authoritarian and domineering approach to teaching of their Tswana colleagues. A connected complaint was the PCVs’ inability to get the students to ‘think critically and independently’. Many of the PCVs, as Alverson (1978:69) puts it:

... go to Botswana imbued with a Summerhill-type world view in which their goal is to help the Tswana “find themselves” and discover the rich experience of creative self-expression.

However, these ambitions are shattered both by the Botswana education system and the response of most Tswana students who want clear instructions as to what is expected of them and clear standards by which they must perform (Alverson 1977). What the PCVs are expressing is indicative of a ‘collision of consciousnesses’. Coming from a different socio-cultural setting where values different from those of the Tswana are cherished, they find it difficult to cope and innovate in their new setting. This may also mean that an attempt to promote a ‘Summerhill-type world view’ in Botswana schools may be resisted by teachers and students, for this would be incompatible with their habit of thought. In fact, a qualitative study by Prophet and Rowell (1993:207) indicated that teachers, students, parents and school administrators in Botswana public schools are generally happy with the qualities of these teacher-dominated classroom interactions and see no need for change. For example, the parents I interviewed in the course of this study indicated that ‘showing

traditional respect' towards their teachers was a prerequisite for the students' learning and success in their examinations. Showing respect meant a number of things to parents. It meant students not challenging the authority of the teacher (as discussed in Chapter Four), not criticizing their teachers, dutifully carrying out instructions from teachers, and having the 'correct' attitude towards their elders. Parents also expected the school to have a restraining effect on their children; they expected the school to play the same functions as the family. So, when they 'handed over' their children to the school they expected teachers to treat them the same way they themselves treated them at home. This tended to put a lot of pressure on the students to be submissive, at the same time empowering teachers to act as domineering figures.

Harmony in the teachers', students', parents' and administrators' perceptions of classroom practice may be explained by recourse to the fact that being products of the same objective conditions, the practices of the four groups of participants are immediately mutually intelligible and predictable. This leads to teachers' and students' homogenised pedagogical expectations of the other. They live in a well-established, taken-for-granted, commonsensical classroom 'world' in which both hold tacit assumptions about issues of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. This common-sense world, coupled with years of classroom experience, makes both the teacher and students have very specific expectations of each other. For example, students expect teachers to be certain in their behaviour and subject knowledge. They expect them to maintain control, enforce rules and present the curriculum (Britzman 1986). Any deviation by the teachers from this traditional image is articulated by both students (as we saw in the preceding chapter) and administrators, and even also by other teachers.

The discussion above leaves no doubt that the pedagogical style (which most research has identified as teacher-centred) employed in the transmission of school knowledge in many African contexts is instrumental to the existing social structure in which the child is dominated and subordinated. It is in this relationship to adults and to knowledge that the child can become a fully integrated member of this society. The point has been made that teaching style mediates the classroom and the wider social structure, that is, it is through the pedagogical style that the social structure finds expression in the classroom setting (Farquharson 1990). As the school has to reproduce the social structure (with its emphasis on the domination and subordination of the child) it has to employ a style of pedagogy that best serves the process of 'filling' the children with knowledge. It is only fair to say that the

transmission-reception pedagogical style in Botswana and elsewhere in Africa has now become institutionalised as an educational tradition, leaving very little room for alternative pedagogies such as learner-centredness. However, as King (1989) argues, once a pedagogical style has become embedded in a society it becomes resilient to changes in government, major curriculum reform or even changes in teacher training. In short, this pedagogy is now institutionalized; it constitutes a pedagogical paradigm and for this reason it is difficult to dislodge. The resistance of teachers, students and administrators to pedagogical change in Botswana and the sub-Saharan African region generally may, therefore, be explained by arguing that they are operating within 'normal science' (which is the banking- education pedagogical paradigm) and see no need for a 'paradigm shift' to the learner-centred pedagogical paradigm. Banking education constitutes their plausibility structure. Attempts to make this structure implausible by introducing an innovation which requires them to operate in a different paradigm can only result in the tissue rejection of that innovation by the participants. This observation buttresses the argument made in Chapter Three that paradigms have implications for pedagogical change.

Linkage of a pedagogical paradigm to the enveloping structure implicitly suggests that dislodging this pedagogical paradigm may require fundamental changes in the social structure itself, in particular, child-rearing practices. However, changing the latter, as has been argued above, is a very slow and difficult process. Because of its neglect of the socio-culturally embedded nature of pedagogy the technicist approach to pedagogical change cannot be expected to be effective in altering the classroom practices of both teachers and students.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Tswana child-rearing practices are structured in accordance with the structures of domination and subordination, leading to the production of a compatible habit of thought. It is this habit of thought which children and teachers internalize as their subjective reality and which they use to make sense of the world that surrounds them. It is this same habit of thought which they carry to the classroom situation as their cultural baggage and which in turn informs their classroom practice, classroom practical knowledge and their assumptions about pedagogy and curriculum. Effectively, this means that pedagogical assumptions are social in that they derive from the existing social structure and are therefore socio-culturally determined. It is in

this sense that we talk of the socio-cultural context as a constraint on teachers' and students' classroom actions and as setting parameters for change. Schools as agents of reproduction of the social structure have to employ a pedagogical style instrumental to the continued existence of that structure. In the African context, banking education is the pedagogical paradigm that is compatible with the social structure. That is, the teacher-centred pedagogical style is simultaneously engendered by and instrumental to the continued existence of the social structure. A fundamentally different pedagogical style, such as learner-centredness, is most likely to face tissue rejection in this socio-cultural context. This rejection cannot just be explained away in terms of technical issues (e.g. the resource scarcity thesis discussed in Chapter One) associated with the delivery of the innovation. The problem is more fundamental since it is related to the issue of culture. For this reason then, when explanations are being sought for the rejection by teachers and students of pedagogical innovations, the socio-cultural context should not be neglected.