A Marxist Reading of Reading Education

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In a recent article in *Language Arts* (July 2001), a professional journal for elementary school educators, Curt Dudley-Marling and Sharon Murphy discuss the tightening of regulation of elementary teachers' lives in school around the issue of reading instruction. Similar to other recent authors (e.g., Coles, 2001; Strauss, 2001), they contrast the best efforts of teachers from the 1980s and early 90s (when there seemed to be opportunity for teachers to compose curriculum and improvise) against the current enthusiasm for compelling teachers to stick to scripts for reading instruction that others have prepared for them. They describe several ways in which businesses have ventured into schools creating markets and looking for efficiencies. They report that business has transformed different literacies into commodities for students to acquire in order to increase their market value later when seeking employment. And finally, they explain how government officials and policies at the state and federal levels are complicit in giving reading programs "the business." Dudley-Marling and Murphy lament these changes and call for teachers to become political in order to oppose this business-like insurgence.

Most progressive educators can agree with the authors' description of what's happening to teachers in elementary schools across the United States. Perhaps these progressives can appreciate the authors' efforts to help teachers understand how the politics of these events transpire beyond their school buildings. Some may even recognize the Marxian foundation of the argument which points toward economics as the rationale of these reforms. Unfortunately, Dudley-Marling and Murphy do not make explicit links between their concerns and Marxist analyses, severely limiting the possibilities of teachers marshaling effective resistance to business encroachment into their school lives. In this brief paper, I make two of these links explicit and offer some explicit suggestions about what becoming political might entail (See Shannon, 1992; 2001 for an elaboration on the latter point.)

Some Historical Context

Marling's and Murphy's concerns about reading instruction are not new. The current efforts to make reading instruction more efficient and effective through business principles began nearly a hundred years ago during the "progressive" era. At the same time that Congress was passing laws to curb the excessive behaviors of business (e.g., the Meat Inspection Act, the Hepburn Act to regulate the railroads, and the Mann-Elkins Act placing telephone and telegraph companies under the jurisdiction of the Interstate Commerce Commission), government officials, journalists, and professional organizations found business management plans irresistible. They become enamored with industries' capability to produce goods cheaply; with their abilities to forge technological solutions of industrial problems; and with the power of a few industrialists to amass huge

fortunes. Celebrated by the media, these industrialists urged all social institutions to adopt business principles of economy and technology. If they would, the industrialist promised more social efficiency and great prosperity for all. This mindset has directed the education of school personnel, the planning and organization of schools, and the expectations of the public since that time (Apple, 2000; Callahan, 1965, Curti, 1935, Giroux, 1983).

The efficiency movement in reading instruction began during the first two decades of the twentieth century (Shannon, 1989). "Primarily schooling is a problem of economy; it seeks to determine in what manner the working unit may be made to return the largest dividend upon the material investment of time, energy, and money" (Bagley, 1911, p. 2). Beginning in 1914, the National Society for the Study of Education's Committee for the Economy of Time in Education applied means/ends rationality to all elementary school subjects, culminating in three reports in 1919 (Principles of Methods as Derived from Scientific Investigation: 1. Teaching Writing, 2. Teaching Spelling, and 3. Teaching Reading). These reports offered rules for the design and practice of curriculum and instruction in elementary schools. Curriculum was set as testable skills with speed and accuracy as the primary criteria for success.

During the 1920s, textbook publishers combined these rules for efficient curriculum with E. L. Thorndike's laws of learning to establish the basal reading series -- a set of graded anthologies, practice books of skills for students, and teacher's manuals for the correct use of the anthologies and teaching of skills. Basals became the official technology of reading instruction that would standardize teachers' practices according to scientific principles in order to ensure efficiency in and control over the quality of student learning. The teacher's manuals listed the skills to be taught in order to ensure readiness, the workbook guaranteed skill exercise, and the correct answers supplied in teacher's manuals encouraged teachers to reinforce students' accurate responses. Since the 1920s, most teachers and administrators have accepted basal teacher's manuals as the correct stimulus to evoke the appropriate standard response from teachers in order to ensure that students received businesslike, scientific instruction. In fact, many state education departments and school districts mandated their use. In a survey during the 1960s (Austin and Morrison), 95 percent of elementary school teachers acknowledged that they used basal materials to direct all of their reading instruction. According to a National Assessment of Educational Progress in 1994, students reported that 80 percent of elementary teachers used commercially produced instructional materials to drive their instruction. Across the century, programmed learning, criterion referenced testing, mastery learning, teacher and school effectiveness, and now curriculum standards and high stakes testing have been proposed as variations on the theme of ensuring that teachers follow the prescribed teacher guides closely in order to make the outcomes of their instruction more predictable and less dependent on teachers.

Compelling Teachers to Follow Scripts

Marxist thought can help us to understand the reasons behind the proliferation of business practices in reading programs and comprehend teachers' apparent welcoming of

these practices. Both are expected consequences of the expansion of the capitalist economic system. The "rationalization" of reading instruction is only part of the spread of capitalist logic throughout public and private life. According to this logic in order to reduce the risk to capital and to maximize profits, all aspects of business must become predictable. This is not as easy as it might seem because people, raw materials, the environment and capital are involved in production. At one time and by some people, each of these contributors were invested with religious significance. In order to make production predictable and profitable, capitalism exploits the Christian and the Enlightenment's "disenchantment" of nature, separating feelings and spirits from raw materials and the environment. Moreover, capitalism posits that work is a rational process devoid of spirituality and emotion, which can become more productive if organized accordingly. These two steps render the dissimilar (people, the environment, and artifacts) comparable according to abstract, value-free laws (both physical and human). In this way, raw materials, the environment, and workers become simply factors in the planning and organization of production -- none of which require any special consideration or treatment. (It is the application of this logic that allows educational policy analyst Diane Ravitch to exclaim "teachers don't need creativity. Teachers need to use methods that have proved successful" (as quoted in Morse, 2000). Accordingly, capitalist logic promises that if all of society could be organized in a similar fashion, then society would run like a business, creating the best conditions for production, technological advance and accumulation. The allure of this promise drives the efforts to rationalize more and more aspects of public and private life.

Accordingly modern institutions, social norms, and even individual actions are developed and judged according to uncaring scientific and meritocratic business principles in order that they can be entered safely as factors into the calculus of modern life. Hierarchical relationships of authority, means/ends analyses, and continuous regulation are intended to ensure this predictability in institutions and everyday matters. Rationalization, then, treats human beings as variables to be manipulated along with materials, time, and space to ensure predictable products and profits from material, ideational or social manufacturing. Marcuse describes the human consequences of this rationalization:

> The private and public bureaucracy thus emerges on an apparently objective and impersonal ground, provided by the rational specialization of function. For, the more the individual functions are divided, fixated, and synchronized according to objective and impersonal pattern, the less reasonable it is for the individual to withdraw and withstand. The material fate of the masses becomes increasingly dependent upon the continuous and correct functioning of the increasingly bureaucratic order of private capitalist organizations. The objective and impersonal character of rationalization bestows upon the bureaucratic groups the universal dignity of reason. The rationality embodied in the giant enterprises makes it appear as if men, in obeying them, obey the dictum of an objective rationality. The private bureaucracy fosters a delusive harmony between the special and the common interests. Private power relationships appear

> not only as relationships between objective things but also as the rule of rationality itself (1941, p. 151)

The conditions of life in contemporary elementary schools provide an example of this rationalization process. The justification for scripted lessons and high stakes testing is the logic of production. Scripts provide the division of function with teachers becoming factors in the implementation of the curricular designs of others; they fix the actions of teachers across classroom, schools, and districts; and they synchronize the actions of teachers and students toward the abstracted exchange value of student test scores. These scores now define teachers' success, become students' cultural capital, legitimize administrators' plans, and raise property values in communities. Using science as the objective and impersonal logic behind the rationalization of reading instruction in elementary schools (See Edmondson and Shannon, in press), the entire process appears natural and inevitable. Inside the logic of rationalized reading programs it makes sense to follow the scripts in order to increase the chances of higher test scores, and few inside or outside of elementary schools object to the rationalization of reading instruction. Those that do object are dismissed as irrational or political. (See Pressley, 1994.) According to Marxist theory, then, the scripted programs for reading instruction are simply an expression of capitalist logic.

Marxist theory also helps us to understand why so many individuals -- teachers, administrators, and taxpayers -- accepted the rationalization. Within attempts to secure student learning through the specialization of teaching functions, individuals lose sight of the human process of teaching and learning (and the scientific study of same). Teachers' work, teaching, and students' work, learning -- once the very expression and incorporation of their generic being -- now confronts them as things apart, indeed as things that command them as property. The scripted programs confront the teachers and the test scores confront the learners. Marx calls this alienation -- the subordination of the worker to the reified product of his labor. The dialectic between reification and alienation helps explain why teachers become complicit in the rationalization of reading instruction and provide a more specific definition of what becoming political might mean.

Reification is the treatment of an abstraction as a concrete object or an immutable procedure. Many teachers, administrators, and taxpayers reify the many possible ways of teaching others to read as the systematic application of the scripted commercial materials and programs. History, educational experts, and business encourage this reification, making these commodities the tools of teaching and learning reading. The scripted programs are produced commercially and objectively without any regard for the emotional and social context of any particular classroom, far from the daily practices of teachers and students. With teachers' work divided, fixated, and synchronized within a rationalized logic, they become one of many factors in teaching students to read. Teaching without basal commodities, then, appears to be the irrational act because the manufacturers of the programs promote their product as the embodiment of scientific investigations as they have for nearly a century. Evidence that teachers have internalized this logic comes from teachers and school districts which exchange one scripted program for another when they find that their students still do not learn to read in a timely fashion.

Reification has at least three consequence/causes: first when they reify reading instruction, teachers and administrators lose sight of the fact that reading instruction is a human process; second, reification of the scientific study of reading instruction as the commercial programs means that their knowledge of reading and instruction is frozen in a single technological form, and third, the reification of learning as test scores requires that they define their work simply as the efficient and effective delivery of this closed system.

Alienation is the process of separation between people and some quality assumed to be related to them in natural circumstances. This process can be consciously recognized (subjective alienation) or be beyond the control of the individual (objective alienation). If you begin with the assumption that reading, teaching and learning are human processes, which are natural qualities of teachers and students, then, the rationalization of reading instruction requires both types of alienation. The script's standardization of teachers' actions requires that the totality of teaching someone to read is "divided, fixated and synchronized," objectively separating teachers from teaching reading. The definition of learning as test scores separates students from the totality of their learning. Reducing teachers and students to factors in the scripted system of test score production requires that they lose, at least officially, emotional, cultural, and social attachments to the process of teaching and learning and to each other. Such detachments demand a subjective separation of teachers from teaching and students from learning. This does not mean that alienated teachers are uncaring or that alienated students lack engagement. Rather it means that the nature of that engagement is subsumed under the process of rationalization and the possibilities of teaching and learning are artificially directed and severely restricted.

A Marxist reading of the current conditions of reading instruction in elementary schools suggests that capitalist rationalization continues to increase its control of teachers' and students' lives through the processes of reification and alienation. These conditions are not unique to reading instruction or schools as rationalization of public and private life are a consequence of the expansion of capitalism. In these terms, teachers' attempts to compose curriculum and to improvise as teachers are a direct rejection of rationalization, the consequent reification of reading instruction, and their objective alienation from their work as teachers. Teachers who compose and improvise, in fact, appear to be in pursuit of the goal of Marx's historical project -- to secure the conditions that would allow, encourage, and support the "universal right to be freely active, to affirm ourselves, to be spontaneous in our activity, and to pursue the free development of our physical and mental energy" (1844/1956, p. 75).

During the 1990s as the possibilities of composing new curricula and improving new relationships among teachers and students and between both and society grew, these teachers and those who led them should have expected reactions from the forces of rationalization. And the "empire" did strike back. First textbook publishers absorbed the rhetoric of composition and improvisation into their scripted programs and the state assimilated these teaching processes without making any accommodations for these practices in the expected tested outcomes. Simultaneously, philanthropic organizations

brokered a consensus that these changes in teaching threatened not only the future of current students, but the economic future of the country as well. Business leaders chimed in that they couldn't find skilled workers for the high wage/high skill jobs they had open. With this consensus, government officials called for the reestablishment of standards and accountabilities, and then, funded research to prove the need for both. Now they are offering under-funded schools' financial incentives to comply. Many educational psychologists were quick to the funding trough, providing scientific reports discrediting composed curricula and improvised teaching. These readjustments to restore rationality in schools were accompanied by renewed reification of scientific inquiry and reading instruction as scripted programs and reinforced alienation of teachers from their work.

Literacy for Sale

Because literacy (however defined) is valued as a cultural, social, and economic possession -- one that gives its owner a headstart in the race for success within groups and society -- corporations, companies, and individual entrepreneurs have produced literacy (or part of it) as a commodity. (See Shannon, 2000 for a more elaborate treatment of the commercialization of reading and reading education.) Because there are several alternative definitions of literacy and differing conceptions of its value, many literacy commodities have been produced from which we can choose. And we have purchased those commodities to either enhance our own cultural, social, and economic capital (computer literacy, anyone?) or to increase the same for our children. In this sense, we acquire literacy as a commodity in order to improve our value as a cultural, social or economic commodity ourselves. This is the crux of Dudley-Marling and Murphy's concern about the commodification of literacy and learners. The forces of rationalization have turned reading and readers into things for sale. Marxist theory can provide a deeper understanding of how this happens and the likely consequences of literacy for sale.

> The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities -- its unit being a single commodity. Our investigation must therefore begin with the analysis of a commodity (Marx, 1967, p.35)

A commodity appears to be just an object, a thing. That thing has a double nature, however. That is, it has use-value (bringing utility and/or pleasure to people) and exchange-value (commanding other objects or money in transactions of daily life). While use-values are a product of both labor and nature (social and physical entities), exchange values are purely social constructs established as ratios of comparable labor among the objects to be exchanged. To make labor comparable across commodities, it must be reduced to a common kind, as undifferentiated and measurable as any other thing involved in commercial production. The human activity of work then must be separated from personal expression or development (the disenchantment) in order to become one of many comparable factors to be considered in the manufacture of things for sale. This need for "abstract" labor requires a particular set of circumstances in which profit is the highest priority in the production of commodities.

That set of circumstances, capitalism, organizes production in such a way to reduce costs of production to a minimum (in order to maximize profits). This profit motive impels capitalist manufacturers to rationalize production -- seeking a division of labor -- a historically specific method of reducing individualized and differentiated work into routine and regular acts, creating new efficiencies. The profit drive, then, creates the powerful forces to homogenize labor and to simplify its form in order to imbue the commodity with the capacity for exchange. Under capitalism, even labor becomes a commodity -- a thing that individuals possess, develop, and sell in order to survive, and perhaps, thrive. Despite their simple appearance as objects, commodities represent all these invisible social relationships.

Marx called the invisibility of these relationships "the fetishism of commodities" (the extension of reification). By this he meant that we lose sight of the social character of commodities and act as if the physical properties of the commodity command a price. Many, even some economists, believe that the thing itself has the power to establish an object's price and to be productive, and not the human labor or the social construction of exchange value. Marx wrote, a "definite social relation between men themselves assumesthe fantastic form of a relation between things" (1967, 165). Capitalism's moral character is based on this fetishism of commodities -- this distortion of reality to make profit off of the work of others.

The confusion between this social right and the physical reality of productivity -- a central part of the fetishism -- obscures the workings of capitalism from public view. It appears that the things are being remunerated with profits for their contribution and not their owners who are accumulating profits. In a sense, however, the transfer is an act of stealing. The physical parts of production are transformed from one state to another, but the surplus value which labor creates (beyond laborers' remuneration) is taken from the laborers. Under capitalism, this government-sanctioned robbery is deemed acceptable (even necessary) by the most precise scientific inquiry -- economics (Heilbronner, 1985). Through their research, economists endeavor to understand the nature of the system and to make its social and personal values seem natural and inevitable among all citizens. With government and science behind it, capitalism projects the illusion that it is the natural state of civilization which we must preserve at all costs -- James Madison's interpretation of that famous phrase "the pursuit of happiness." Once environment, capital, and labor are transformed in to commodities and those commodities are fetishized, all opportunities for subversive interpretations of the system disappear.

Each commodity that we encounter, then, can teach us about capitalism as a socially constructed, historical system of production. There is nothing eternal or natural about capitalism (although there are universals within it and a recognizable order to its system). When we consider "commodification" -- the transformation of practices, things and ideas into things for sale -- we must remember its social construction, and not just dwell only upon the immediate appearance and illusion of the new commodity created. The values directing each transformation include the central role of profits in the structures and practices of our daily life, the rights of owners of the means of production to all the profits from commodity exchange, the notion that laborers must be alienated from their

work in order to achieve the highest exchange-value for commodities, and the fact that any thing, one, practice or idea can become a commodity.

At a cultural level, commodities represent the values of their manufacturers (Schor, 2000). The thing for sale is an embodiment of not only the generalized values of capitalism, but also of what manufacturers want in the world and how they wish to live with others. Manufacturers produce commodities for profit, of course, but also enter production to make the world better (according to their vision of better). This may seem hard to accept with so many apparently cynical commodities on the market (chocolate cereals, hand guns, cigarettes, Elvis statues). Yet, cereal manufacturers point to the importance of choice in the development of individuals and to the aid that they bring to parents who struggle to get their children to eat breakfast. Hand gun producers trot out the second and fourth amendments to the U. S. Constitution as their moral justification. Each commodity expresses its manufacturer's commitment to freedom of choice, to quality of life, and to an ideal of how the world should work (Lear, 1994). Even manufacturers who consciously make and sell products they know to be harmful display their values about how the world should work and their elevated position in that world. As John Edgar Widemann (1995) suggested about those who propose barbaric prison conditions, these manufacturers do not believe that their products or the conditions under which they are produced are for people like themselves.

To understand the commercialization of reading instruction, then, we must examine the commodities offered, the markets created and the values promoted through the extension of capitalism into elementary schools. Consider the Open Court reading program published by the Science Research Associates (SRA), which thousands of schools and school districts have adopted across the United States. Similar to other commercially prepared reading programs, Open Court provides anthologies of children's stories, a scope and sequence of skills to be taught as students work their way through the anthologies, many forms of practice and assessment of those skills, and a teacher's guidebook to direct teachers on how to coordinate the use of all the materials across each grade level. Open Court is a scripted program which means that the teacher's guidebook includes explicit directions for both teachers and students on what they are to do and how that are to do it each day of reading instruction. As one California principal reports, Open Court assures that "what is happening in one class is happening in another. Teachers work from detailed instructional guides, scripted down to the very examples they are to write on the board" (Anderluh, 1998, A1). For example, the teacher's guidebook for Grade 1 opens with these words:

> Choose one or more of the following activities to focus the children's attention and to review some of the concepts they have been learning.
>
> Sound Review: Name a family spelling card and call on a child to say the sound the card represents. The child should then give a word that contains the sound and identify where the sound is heard in the word. That child then names a new card and calls on another child to say the new sound and a new word. Continue in this manner.

> Identify Rhymes: Write the three words on the chalkboard.

The tone and register of these directions continue throughout the first grade teacher's guidebook, across the guides for the practice activities, and through the sixth grade guidebook to the last lesson. At every moment, it is clear what teachers should do and who is in charge of the instruction.

At the beginning of each teacher's guidebook, SRA lists Open Court's authors and prints its mission statement. The authors of the first-grade edition are well known educational psychologists who have published widely on reading, writing, and instruction. After the authors names, lists of consultants both university- and school-based are presented to demonstrate that many educators have looked at the materials and found them worthy. Because Open Court is a commodity it hides the true producers of the final product. The authors listed for Open Court wrote few of the stories, lessons, instructions, practices, or assessments. They may have written none. What they did was provide a template of what the skills should be, the order that made logical sense to them, the format for the lessons, the orientation of the lessons, and perhaps the modes of assessment. They negotiated a framework for the program among themselves, and probably reviewed a selected sample of the finished product. Between their establishment of the framework and the completed programs, scores of scribes and editors worked on the actual pages of the Open Court program. That's not to mention the layout production and the actual printing crews.

21. Moreover, the framework that was negotiated isn't really the authors' production. Rather it is an abstracted form of the lessons that these authors have observed experienced teachers present. This is not to imply that the authors stole the framework from any one teacher. They regularized the practices of teachers who they have defined as good teachers and suggested that SRA package them for other teachers to buy. This intention to sell the lessons reduces the possible use value of those original lessons that unnamed teachers devised for their students at a certain time in a certain place. The exchange hides the original use value and the human labor behind the colorful pages.

This cloak -- the fetishism of commodities as Marx called it -- makes it seem as if the materials are responsible for students learning to read. SRA encourages this assumption among teachers and the public:

> Students who experience Collections for Young Scholars: learn how to read and respond to a variety of texts; acquire strategies for accessing information and for explaining concepts from many areas of knowledge including some that do not even exist today; learn how to communicate effectively using both oral and written language; learn how to work both independently and collaboratively; and give sustained effort to thinking and problem solving. (p. 10)

This statement suggests that the scripted program, and not the interaction of teacher and students around text, produce learning. Because the lessons are scripted, teachers are

extensions of the program. Because the students' route through the program is also scripted, they become extensions of the program as well. The human essence of reading, teaching, and learning are lost from view.

Although Open Court may be a more explicit tool in the rationalization of reading instruction than other basal programs, they are not different in kind. Basal reading programs are commercial endeavors and must rationalize and carry the social entailments of capitalism with them into classrooms. The fetishism of these commodities instantiates a morality that is at odds with the possibilities of literacy. While literacy can be domesticating as we see when the teacher reads the scripts, it can also be liberating, allowing teachers and students to write and read their own scripts. This language of possibility is present in SRA's statement about the powers of their commodity -- the Open Court reading program. However, the scripts and the rationalized logic behind the scripts contradict these possibilities -- at least in the classroom. In this way, Open Court allows us to see the conditions of work in elementary classrooms that restrict both students' and teachers' development because, as Marx explained, each commodity contains the social relations of capitalism.

Projects of Possibility

In their article, Dudley-Marling and Murphy celebrate the teachers who resist the consequences of the past rationalization of reading instruction and call for teachers and parents to become political concerning the new efforts to rationalize. The authors seek a cultural politics committed to creating specific forms of schooling that encourage and foster the realization of differentiated human capacities. This politics requires a dialectical effort to change the minds and social conditions of teachers, administrators and taxpayers. This is what Marx meant by praxis, the bond between thinking and doing in which ideas and ideals can only be vindicated and validated by some kind of activity. According to Marx, reality is not merely what is, but what we make of it. Marxist educational praxis, then, is intended to provide more than an understanding of politics or schooling or whatever historical circumstance; it is intended to serve as a guide for making politics, schooling, history. By illuminating past and current efforts to rationalize teachers' and students' lives, Marxism can help teachers understand the cognitive, social, and physical structures of the past congealed in the present, opening teachers' awareness to unsuspected aspects of their social existence. A Marxist understanding of rationalization and commodification of reading instruction changes the terms by which teachers accept the present and thereby changes their abilities to shape the future.

Becoming political, then, requires that teachers judge all past, present and future school structures by their moral unfolding, or more precisely, their orientation toward human freedom. Inquiry into the structures of reading instruction (or any other practice) must center on a commitment to the idea of human emancipation. In this way, the contradiction between the rhetoric of Open Court concerning the possibilities of literacy and the actual scripted social relations of that reading program which turn teachers and students into things can serve as an opening for what Roger Simon calls "projects of possibility":

> I am using the term 'project' here in the particular sense in which it was discussed by Sartre as an activity determined by both real and present conditions, and conditions still to come which it is trying to bring into being. In this sense a project of possibility begins with a critique of current realities. This critique suggests that a contradiction exists between the openness of human capacities that we encourage in a free society and the social forms that are provided and within which we must live our lives. It is this contradiction which is the starting point for a project of possibility and defines its broad aim: the transformation of the relation between human capacities and social forms. More particularly the project requires both the expansion of forms to accommodate capacities and the expansion of capacities to make the realization of new forms possible. Such a project would reject the resolution of this contradiction between capacities and forms through narrowing of capacities to fit existing forms or through the narrowing of forms to fit preconceived, fixed, 'naturalized' notions of capacities. (Simon, 2001, 141-142)

The social form of Open Court's tight scripting of teachers' and students' words and actions during reading instruction contradicts the openness of literacy, teaching, and learning. Despite the talk of higher test scores, efficient instruction, and systematic learning, the program cannot lead to human emancipation. Although it may be argued that the controlled beginning will eventually lead students to greater futures, this line of reasoning suggests the narrowing of social forms to fit preconceived, fixed and naturalized notions of what their capacities might be in the future. Some may overcome the controlled beginning to use literacy to open opportunities in their lives, but some will also internalize the process of control, limiting the potential of their development. And of course, the scripted lives are all there is offered to teachers. Neither teacher nor students is likely to make possible the realization of a variety of differentiated human capacities.

This contradiction does not lie in the scripts themselves, but in the forces of rationalization which attempt to standardize reading programs in order to make them predictable factors in the productive industrial equations. Those forces rely on the reification of all possible social structures and means for teaching reading as the commercially produced, scientifically validated scripted programs. Rationalization and reification result in the alienation of teachers from their work and their students because the fetishism of the commodified programs makes it appear as if the materials are the agents of teaching and learning. Similar contradictions can be found in more and more aspects of our public and private lives, all of which have been rationalized in order to ensure that capitalism endures and expands. In this way, the composers and innovators in education are linked with the composers and innovators in other fields of work -- child care and health care workers, agricultural workers, service workers, and many others.

Teachers becoming political from a Marxian standpoint means raising our own and others' consciousness about the root causes of scripted lessons, high stakes testing, and commercialization of schools and schooling. This is by no means an easy task because the structures of rationalization and commodification are cognitive, social, and physical.

Those cognitive structures weigh heavily on even the innovative teacher. Harder still may be learning to act in conjunction with other workers suffering under increased pressures of rationalization in their work. Until those alliances are made, the chances for effective politics in education are limited. To really address Dudley-Marling's and Murphy's concerns, and not continue to stagger from opposition of one rationalized solution to another, we must stop the unmediated expansion of capitalism into social institutions that should be in the business of human emancipation. (See Shannon, 1998 for an elaboration on this point.) This means teachers should join the movements toward livable minimum wages, national health insurance, affordable housing, and repeal of NAFTA and GATT. They should make their presence know at the protests of the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund. These are large projects of possibility that show promise on a large scale.

On a smaller scale, the local, state and national movements concerning high stakes testing are projects of possibility. Attempts to incorporate choice about methods at a district and school level keeps open the possibilities of reading instruction, allowing at least some composition of curricula and innovation in teaching. Wrestling control of time away from forty-two-minute periods and 180 day grade levels and space away from isolated rooms and individual desks undercuts the standardization of reading instruction. Working with other adults (parents, custodians, librarians, local business owners, etc.) as co-teachers expands the possibilities of literacy and learning for all involved. Each of these acts rejects the rationalization of schools, the reification of reading instruction and science, and the alienation of teachers from their teaching and students from their learning. Each is directed by a commitment to human emancipation.

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