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No More Classes? Framing Pedagogy in a Self-Paced Secondary School

Analysis of an outcome-based, self-paced high school in Western Canada demonstrates the difficulty of changing the grammar of schooling even through extensive reform. Aiming to be a school for everyone, the institution studied has ended up as an alternative high school for students who possess middle-class cultural capital: the very people who tend to succeed in conventional schools. Discussion shows how the frames of pedagogy at the school are interrelated, so that changing one produces a compensatory effect in the others; and how the need to be seen as a successful school ultimately undermines the motivation for reform.

L'analyse d'une école secondaire à rythme libre et fondée sur les résultats dans l'Ouest du Canada démontre à quel point les fondements pédagogiques sont difficiles à changer, même avec une réforme poussée. En essayant de se constituer en une école pour tous, l'institution à l'étude s'est transformée en école secondaire alternative pour les élèves possédant un bagage culturel typique de la classe moyenne – et c'est précisément le genre d'élèves qui réussissent dans les écoles conventionnelles. L'article explique que, d'une part, l'interdépendance des cadres pédagogiques de l'école est telle que la modification d'un des cadres provoque un effet de compensation dans les autres et que, d'autre part, le besoin d'être considérée une école exemplaire vient miner, à la longue, la motivation visant la réforme.

Success Secondary is a new building on the outskirts of a dormitory town in Western Canada. In many ways it looks like other schools of the early 1990s, with architecture resembling a cross between a shopping mall and a spaceship. The building is low and green-roofed, an island in a sea of parking lots and playing fields. There is, however, one crucial difference between Success Secondary and the vast majority of high schools. Success Secondary was designed from the first to reflect progressive ideals and avoid the soul-destroying "lockstep" of conventional schooling, with pedagogy centered around the concept of self-paced, outcome-based education. No more timetables, teacher allocated homework, or subject cohorts. At this school the individual student is seen as the center of the educational process.

My analysis examines how the pedagogic system of the school has changed as a result of this substantive reform. The work of Tyack and Cuban (1995) suggests that the "grammar of schooling" is extremely robust, able to change reforms as much as reforms alter the patterns of schooling. They point out that "For over a century citizens have sought to perfect the future by debating how to improve the young through education. Actual reforms in schools have rarely matched such aspirations" (p. 1). My observations of Success are consistent with their argument that radical changes tend to backfire and produce unexpected consequences. Although the innovators responsible for designing the

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school imagined they were creating a school for everyone where all students would succeed to the best of their ability, examination suggests this progressive ideal had different outcomes. My discussion illustrates how pedagogic systems adjusted to compensate for change, so that substantial adjustments to the means did not significantly affect the ends.

The case study is theoretically informed by the work of Bernstein (1975, 1996), which provides a means to examine the overall educational effect of the school by examining a number of specific aspects of the curriculum. This approach to analyzing Success Secondary highlights two aspects of the reformed school. First, all frames of pedagogy are interlinked, so that altering one inevitably affects others—often in unforeseen ways. Second, the effects of reform will be limited as long as the social effect of the educational process remains the same. Schools are far more tightly woven than is often recognized, either internally or in the wider social context.

Codes in the Classroom

My examination of Success Secondary applies the theoretical insights of British educational sociologist Bernstein (1975, 1996) as a means to pull apart the strands of pedagogy. Bernstein, who died in 2000, reworked a core set of ideas about the process of education for several decades. His central interest was analyzing educational settings by examining the knowledge they contain and how that knowledge is structured through language. This discussion concentrates on one aspect of education that received attention from Bernstein: the frame factors that shape pedagogic process. These factors fall into two groups, the first being those concerned with the formal teaching process or *instructional* discourse. These factors include the pacing of teaching, the content, the order in which items are taught, and the criteria used to evaluate the process. The second group represents behavioral expectations, or *regulative* discourse. When the teacher has control of these aspects of classroom management the pedagogy is a strongly framed code, and when the students have control it is a weakly framed code (Bernstein, 1996). Frame factors may “vary with respect to the elements of practice, so that, for example, you could have weak framing over pacing but strong framing over other aspects of the discourse” (p. 27). Bernstein also suggests that the factors of instructional discourse are determined to a large extent by the regulative discourse. In other words, the requirements of the socialization function of educational settings have an overarching effect on the teaching style. One important implication of this argument is that changes in pedagogy may not be sufficient to alter the outcomes of schooling if the behavior expected of students remains the same.

Bernstein (1975) explored framing of progressive education in some depth in his work on invisible and visible pedagogy. Conventional schooling has strong frames, meaning a great deal of teacher control and clear expectations, and can be considered as visible pedagogy. Progressive schooling is far more weakly framed, with high degrees of student-centeredness and an invisible pedagogic code. On the face of it, liberal reformers should embrace the less visible forms of pedagogy, but Bernstein urges caution and warns against the assumption that less institutional control results in a more inclusive and democratic curriculum. Application of an invisible code requires a group of students with a great deal in common so that the behavioral rules do not have to

be made explicit. He argues that progressive schooling works best when all the students come from middle-class homes and have shared dispositions such as valuing education highly. The frames of instructional discourse can be weaker, because the regulative discourse has already been internalized by the students as a shared and unquestioned norm. Therefore, Bernstein concludes, invisible pedagogy is not better in its own right, because it may simply arise from a selective intake process rather than a commitment to progressive ends. We must always ask who benefits from any particular organization of knowledge, and it is this question that I carried into my study of the reforms at Success Secondary.

Background To The Research

This discussion is based on partial findings from a research project conducted by Jane Gaskell of the University of British Columbia between 1997 and 2000 to examine the implications of school choice. The wider research used ethnographic studies of a number of schools—both schools of choice and others—to look at where the motivation for school choice comes from, what forms it takes, and what implications it holds for pedagogy and school organization. The research team were involved with Success Secondary for over a year, observing classes and corridors; formally interviewing students, teachers, administrators, and district personnel; and examining instructional and organizational documents. The direct quotes used in this discussion are derived from taped and transcribed interviews with school personnel and students, and to protect confidentiality no names are used. Due to its novel organization the school was relatively familiar with having researchers on site, and research participants appeared comfortable talking about their experience at Success.

Exploring Success Secondary as a school of choice—established to reflect a set of clear beliefs about what makes education valuable—brought up a number of issues common to many attempts at school reform. One of the strongest influences on the school's organization was the planning team's visit to Bishop Carroll in Calgary, one of J. Lloyd Trump's model schools in the 1970s. Success Secondary took on several features of Trump's (1977) approach as described in *A School for Everyone*, including teacher-advisors, individualized scheduling, and a combination of open and closed, noisy and quiet spaces. The central impetus shared by Success, Bishop Carroll, and the other model schools was determination to avoid "the fetish of uniformity" (p. 4). The current principal was quick to point out one central difference from Bishop Carroll, however. The integration of technology as an instructional and administrative tool eliminated the "paperwork hell" created by individualized learning programs and made Success Secondary far more viable as a provider of reformed education.

One of the most interesting aspects of Trump's (1977) work is the degree to which it is administratively progressive without necessarily being politically progressive. The central idea of his reform is that schools should be "personalized," but the implications of this idea are left largely unexplored. It could be taken to refer to a progressive impulse toward experientially based education that recognizes the diversity of children and their learning styles, or it could mean a mechanism for ranking students by their likely vocational role. The language of standards used by Trump is strongly reminiscent of current educa-

tional discourse with its emphasis on students and parents as consumers of education in search of excellence (Beane, 1998), and it is not surprising to find that Success Secondary does not set out to change the role of the school in social reproduction. Indeed, the basic tasks of conventional schooling are set up as goals to aspire to rather than to be challenged or even questioned. In this case, I found it peculiar that the school went to such lengths to change so many aspects of the day-to-day operation of the school without even considering the aim of the educational system. Although Success Secondary was a school of choice in terms of attendance and pedagogy, it offered no alternative vision of what a well-educated person would look like.

In the following discussion I use work based in the new sociology of education to show how the changes at Success Secondary have not altered the fundamental role of the school as a site for the transmission and reproduction of middle-class cultural capital. This basic role underpins the grammar of schooling, those values that schools maintain in the face of reforms and that are an important factor in how proposed innovations manifest themselves in the institution. Before showing one way cultural capital supports the persistence of the grammar of schooling, I explain how I conceptualized the pedagogic process at Success Secondary.

Organizing For Success

From the beginning of the planning period in the mid-1980s the district administration wished to do something different. The growth of the city's population created an opportunity for a new high school, and the school board supported the development of an innovative approach. The central motivation for the planning team was their belief that the conventional high school system excluded and marginalized too many people, and they wanted to find a way to serve each student as fully as possible. Administrators quickly concluded that lockstep education managed by a universal timetable was inherently flawed, because it assumed that everybody learned at the same rate and in the same way. After several visits to reformed schools throughout North America the planning team decided to follow an outcome-based, self-paced concept as much as possible and were aware of how dramatically this could change the school.

When you say time is not a factor and you say the learning style of the students is paramount those two drivers challenge almost everything in terms of the way our educational systems run from the actual classroom, right through the superintendent's office. (Administrator, personal communication)

Two of the pedagogical "pillars" critical to the development of Success Secondary were self-pacing and the teacher-advisor system. In self-paced schooling each student takes primary responsibility for the speed at which he or she works. Because this results in each student effectively having his or her own timetable, written learning guides are used to deliver the education, and interaction between students and teachers is based around individuals rather than classrooms. Students taking a grade 10 physics class, for example, would work their way through 20 learning guides, working for about five hours on each, taking tests as they went, and seeing a physics teacher only for marking or for assistance. Some courses have periodic seminars built in, but the overall

design of the school reflects a commitment to the smallest possible amount of external control over a student's progress.

The second pillar is the teacher-advisor (TA) system. Each teacher in the school is allocated a cross-grade group of around 20 students whom they support and monitor. The TA assists the student with planning, provides discipline, and functions as an information conduit between the school, parents, and students. The TA groups meet twice daily, and at these meetings TAs distribute general information, marks, and final grades, as students have to show their work plans to the TA for approval. This is a complex and unusual role for teachers, and it is essential to student success that it is performed well. The relationship between the student and the TA is critical, because students are part of the same TA group for all five years of their secondary school career.

The pedagogic changes are reflected in the design of the school building, which deliberately avoids classrooms and consists of a number of open areas. The largest is an enormous room about 80 meters long and two storeys high. There are around 200 students in this room at any one time, clustered around small tables, working alone or talking and laughing in groups. Teachers are scattered throughout the space, going from student to student as help is requested. Each student in the room may be at a different part of a different learning guide, and teachers are expected to help students with whatever they are working on, so an English teacher could be assisting with grade 9 spelling at one desk and grade 12 textual analysis at the next. The noise level is fairly high, and the feel is similar to a creative advertising firm, with lots of stimulus for the students and a remarkable amount of work being done.

The senior staff at the school believe the work they are doing through reforming pedagogy is important. By individualizing instruction and accountability, staff believe they are preparing students for "the workplace of the 21st century," where flexible knowledge workers will self-manage to success. Use of computer technology is an important aspect of this imagined future, as is incorporation of work experience into the senior grades. The impulse toward individualized education as a pedagogically desirable step is balanced by the conviction that it also leads to economic success for students. Unlike earlier progressive movements, or indeed contemporary progressive commentators (Apple, 1993; Beane, 1998), combining benefits to students with benefits to the economy is seen as unproblematic.

On the surface there is little doubt that Success Secondary appears remarkably different from a typical secondary school, with far less regimentation and explicit control over students. In Bernstein's (1975, 1996) terms, those involved in Success Secondary have worked hard to weaken the framing around pacing and sequencing of education and would also claim to have weakened criteria and content to some degree. Beginning from a progressive stance the staff have struggled to develop and maintain a more invisible form of pedagogy, believing that this change will lead to a higher quality of education accessible to more students. However, examining the curricular structures more closely suggests that the effects have not been as expected.

Instructional Discourse

A reform as substantial as that at Success Secondary affects the school on many levels. In this discussion the two most significant areas to examine are order

and pace of learning and the content and evaluative systems that support this learning.

Order and Pace of Learning

The key to a self-paced system is to focus on outcomes achieved rather than the micro-management of the learning process, leaving students able to spend as long as they need to or wish to on courses. In effect, the frames around pace and order are deliberately relaxed, which leaves students with some degree of control over the time they commit to each component. One obvious benefit arises for more able students, who can create an accelerated program and finish high school in four, or maybe even three, years. Alternatively, students who need more time and support can have both without the stigma conventionally attached to a six- or seven-year completion time. For most students, for whom five years is a reasonable time to complete high school, the system primarily allows the order of learning to be changed.

Despite the removal of the master timetable from Success Secondary, most students progress at around one year per grade level as measured by course completion. Although programs are individually paced in theory, there is a pragmatic requirement for the student body as a whole to move through at a speed close to the provincial norm. The most significant administrative influence on completion time is funding at the ministry and board levels. "They say, 'yeah it's going to take you longer but we're going to give you five years [of funding]. I don't care how you do it, fit it in the five years'" (Teacher, personal communication). If most students ended up taking either too long or too short a time to complete high school, Success Secondary would be in trouble, either because of the costs of having most students using more than five years of resources or from declining student numbers if each left after only four years.

The weakening of the frame around order and pace has not reduced the significance of time for most people involved in the school, but made it an implicit and pervasive concern. The lack of a timetable means that there is no standard reference, and the speed of learning has to be negotiated with each student. In a school of close to 1,000 students, this is an enormously complex situation. The most common approach to judging progress is by comparison with a shared set of expectations about how much an individual should have completed by any particular point in their program.

Let's say that they should be covering 12 learning guides, 14 learning guides a month, and then September will be the slower start up and those kinds of things. But if after a couple of months you see that they're only in the 6 and 7 range completion, total, you're going, "what's wrong here?" (Administrator, personal communication)

The timetable has been replaced by tacit conventions about the pace of learning, although they are not universal or explicitly imposed. In Bernstein's (1975, 1996) terms, the visible frame of the conventional timetable has become a component of invisible pedagogy. The weakening of the pacing factor moves the onus for educational management from the administrators of the school onto individual students, parents, and teachers. The primary role of the TAs becomes managing the progress of students on an individual level. During the

morning meetings they want to know what the students will be doing that day and if they have the resources they need. TAs see their job as helping the students to develop their own time-management skills.

We work on things like personal planning and I'm trying to get my students into the habit of making really short-term goals for their day. Get these 10 questions done, okay the next day you can get these 10 questions, so then eventually you have them taking one step at a time to the completion of the learning guides. So, and then soon I'm going to try to tie that into some medium planning where I've devised some ways for them to say, "Okay, [if] I want to get this course by this date I need to do these learning guides." (Teacher, personal communication)

Teachers in Success Secondary have to be skilled in both their subject area and in modeling and teaching time management. Speaking about TAs, one teacher said, "There's the added problem that some adults are simply not good organizers and there are some TAs that don't do as well as other TAs in helping their kids organize, and it shows in their kids." The distribution of time, which is conventionally macro-managed by the timetable, is now micro-managed at the level of individual students and teachers, who may be more or less skilled at ensuring steady progress.

The same effect can be seen in the sequencing of learning, the order in which learning guides are tackled in each course. Administrators believe that knowledge of the learning guide system helps students to take control.

So they know this whole curriculum that they're going to be dealing with so they have the preparation to be able to say, okay, I don't have to do it in this sequence, I don't have to do it in this way, I can in fact negotiate how I might do this. (Administrator, personal communication)

Some students use the flexibility of sequence strategically to ensure that their school time remains focused.

I generally work through them systematically, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, the learning guides. I'll just do them in order but you know, there's a lot of time, say you're doing an English learning guide, you have to read a novel for it and you can go home, you read the novel after school and you can work on the next learning guide while you're at school the next day. (Student, personal communication)

The frame factor of sequencing is weaker at Success Secondary than at a conventional timetable-driven school, with students having a fair amount of control over their own order of learning. However, the numerical naming of learning guides (e.g., English 10, Unit 2, Guide 3) implicitly encourages a particular approach to the work. Like pacing, although to a lesser extent, it seems that the visible frame around sequencing has been replaced by invisible practices.

Content and Evaluation of Learning

The deliberate remodeling of pace and sequence has had interesting effects on content and evaluation. There was little opportunity to change the curriculum when Success Secondary was being developed, as the content of the curriculum is largely determined by government guidelines. In most conventional classrooms this is balanced by the ability of the teacher to reorganize and prioritize the content as needed. This is far harder to do in Success, with the

material in the learning guides chosen by writers rather than being negotiated between the teacher and a class of students.

The writers of the original guides tried to include everything in the provincial curriculum, resulting in guides that were enormously long, detailed, and complex. Each guide was originally meant to represent five hours of work, but "One of the guides it took me 33 hours to go through and I'm supposed to be a teacher. I can't understand this stuff" (Teacher, personal communication). Since then the guides have been continually revised. One teacher estimated that some have been rewritten 10 or 15 times over the five years the school has been open. Some content has become optional, provided for enrichment rather than credit. What has not changed significantly is the rigidity of the core activities in each course, with few parallel options open to students. If a student wishes to move on to English 11, he or she must complete the 20 guides in English 10, Unit 2, and this may include writing a poem or demonstrating empathy with the emotions of another. Although the size of the content has been reduced, the strength of the boundary surrounding it has not.

The content of the curriculum at Success Secondary is framed strongly; and because it is written into guides, it is more open to public scrutiny than in the conventional classroom. There are informal opportunities for students to have an influence and weaken the frame, but these are limited by the student numbers and the need to work with a highly structured educational process. Although major changes to the formal curriculum await revision of the learning guide, elective areas are able to exercise more flexibility because fewer students take the courses each year. One teacher told us about an elective area where a certain course was being taken for the first time since the school opened. The teachers were developing the guides just ahead of the student and using the student's experience to decide what should be included in the course. In general, though, students have few opportunities to exercise control over curricular content.

The situation is quite similar when it comes to evaluation, and it is ironic that during the development of an outcome-based school there was little opportunity to develop detailed criteria for student outcomes in each of the grades. The school's mission statement has a number of broad goals, including the creation of productive citizens, but there are few measurable objectives in the school or the district. The two sets of criteria for success commonly referred to by the school and wider community are grade 12 examination results and less formal measures of everyday student performance.

The first criterion refers to performance on provincial grade 12 exams in a number of core subject areas. A local newspaper prints the academic results of every school throughout the province, and Success Secondary did well in several categories. Although most staff discount this exercise, parents and board members acknowledge that it makes a difference. "You know, I think, at least at the district level, we were real pleased with that kind of positive coverage" (Board member, personal communication). Some parents found that it affirmed their view of the school:

It's funny cause some of the people that don't like the school, or haven't liked it, they read the article of course but we actually made sure we phoned them and said, "Oh, did you see?" just in conversation. (Personal communication)

This publicity underlines the importance of good provincial exam results to the continuing success of the school, and this shows in a number of ways. For example, the pass rate for most courses in the school is 60%, but for courses leading to a provincial exam it is 70%. Younger students commented that it was hard to get help around provincial exam time because the teachers were working with the candidates. The provincial exams are a significant, and strongly framed, set of criteria for the school and for the students.

The criteria for everyday evaluation of students' learning are less strongly framed. Although they have to complete every learning guide to a satisfactory standard, students frequently negotiate with teachers about how this outcome will be demonstrated. This provides an opportunity for students to attempt unconventional projects or to combine learning guides and gain credits in several courses with the same piece of work. A number of teachers tell the story of one grade 11 student who negotiated a five-learning-guide project in biology into a 20-learning-guide multidisciplinary credit. This kind of entrepreneurship is encouraged at the school, justified by the belief that attaining the outcome is more important than how it is attained.

Ultimately, the two commonly accepted criteria in Success Secondary are relatively strongly framed. For the school in general, and grade 12 students in particular, they are controlled by the demands of postsecondary institutions and the curriculum designers who shape the provincial exam. For everyday evaluation the control lies in the hands of the teachers, either because they wrote the original learning guides or because they have to agree to any innovative means of demonstrating the outcome. Although there is some room to maneuver, the individual with least control over criteria for success is the student.

Regulative Discourse

The regulative discourse consists of the behavioral expectations at the school, which both shape the instructional discourse and extend beyond it to other aspects of school life. Given the strength of the individual focus at Success Secondary, it comes as no surprise that the behavioral requirements of the school are most often described in terms of the personality traits of the student—especially motivation, maturity, and self-management. Examining these traits provides insight into how the school community acts to reproduce certain values.

The first trait of the successful student, and the one that was most consistently referred to, was motivation. One student told us:

You do need to have motivation. You can't just expect the teachers to come to you like in a traditional school. Our principal has said that this school is more like a major business environment and in business if you want help you have to go out and get it, and that's what they're endorsing here at this school. (Personal communication)

One parent pointed out the role of social background in the development of motivation: "I mean for the kids that are motivated and have really pushy parents, they're going to make it no matter what. But for the average kid, just the run of the mill 90% of them, or probably more than that, it's really difficult."

The second trait was maturity, which was seen as largely reflecting the age of the student. To some people, though, the choice to attend an outcome-based school was itself a demonstration of maturity. One administrator suggested that “the ones that make the choice [to attend the school] probably are different, maybe more mature” (Personal communication). To others the self-paced system ensured that maturity would be developed:

I think students learn to be mature and even if it’s taken you two years longer, well if you’re in a regular school you would be out on time but maybe you’re not ready to go onto the next step. But I think that no matter how long it takes you here, I mean reasonably, once you’re out of here you’ll have the maturity that you were supposed to have in the five years. (Student, personal communication)

The final broadly recognized trait was self-management, both in terms of time allocation and general behavior such as making sure to get help when needed. One student, when asked who would be successful at the school, told us:

Somebody who’s organized and can do their planner cause we have to do our daily plans in our teacher advisor group in the mornings. Someone who’s not afraid to go up and speak to their teachers. I mean if people are [not] very confident in speaking with the teachers and asking for help and stuff, then they’re the ones that tend to fall behind. (Personal communication)

Teachers view self-management as involving both teachable skills and family background:

We can teach organization to them and that’s the role of the TA but a kid that does well right from the beginning comes in with good organizational skills. Good time management, ability to focus and stay with a task. But those are the skills that you work on teaching too. (Personal communication)

Parents also told us about the strategies they use to help students to manage their programs:

Academically [he] was really a strong student, and motivationally he was a strong student. He did have some weak points in organizational skills and stuff, which that was the part that I was worried about ... We have a chart on the fridge for both kids. Each subject they’re taking, the list of 20 learning guides, what one they’re working on, and you know a dot means they’re working on it, a tick means they’ve handed everything in and a C means it’s completed. (Personal communication)

Each of these three traits can be viewed as an aspect of personality, but they are also a product of the social background of the student, considered in terms of class, family type, or the amount of direct support available. The explanations for success refer to a specific type of student who lives in a specific context and who has access to the resources and knowledge that make it possible for students to direct their own schooling. Another way to consider the meaning of these traits is to ask for whom the school does not work. The most common reason for students to leave the school is lack of progress, which was generally seen by staff and students alike as a result of the student’s lack of the motivation, maturity, or self-management skills. I suggest an alternative explanation: that the students who left lacked the appropriate cultural capital and social

background to function well in such an educational environment. Without family commitment to monitoring student progress or the knowledge of how to manage time effectively, it would be extremely difficult to do well at the school, and the social environment most likely to offer such assets to students is strongly middle class. Administrators commented that even though the school was in a blue-collar neighborhood, a disproportionate number of the students came from middle-class homes that valued education—this is why they chose to send their children to Success. This explanation gains more credibility from a comment made by a student, who remarked with some puzzlement, “Our school is actually known as the snob school for some reason. I don’t know why we’ve got that thing but we’re just like, we’re known as the big snob school in the whole district” (Personal communication).

The critical question for this analysis is, Who has control over the behavioral expectations at Success Secondary? The outcome-based, self-paced system requires students to behave in particular ways or it will not work, and these required behaviors are described in terms of individual personality traits. The progressive philosophy of the school administrators does support a genuine desire to weaken the framing of behavior at the school, but it is believed that having greater student control over the rules of conduct will only be effective if students are certain types of persons. In essence, the school’s fundamental discourse of individuality is in tension with the need to make sure students act in ways defined by the school as demonstrating responsibility. Even on the level of personality, students have little control over how they fit into the institution.

Decoding Success

In making sense of the school and its reforms, two areas emerged as important to examine. The first is the relationship between the attempt to create a self-paced school and the pedagogical structures in place, and the second is the significance of middle-class cultural capital in the creation and modeling of the institution.

Reform and the Frames of Instruction

A central factor in this analysis is how the frames of pedagogy are altered by the reform. The founders of the school set out explicitly to relax the frames around pacing and sequencing of learning, and succeeded within the limits of funding and school administration. There can be little doubt that order of learning is more open to change than in conventional high schools, and pace of learning is also more flexible. However, content and evaluation may be even more strongly framed than in other schools due to the pragmatic complexities of administering a self-paced system. The inability of teachers to instruct dozens of students individually leads to the adoption of written learning guides, which makes the content of the curriculum both inflexible and highly public. Similarly, the criteria for success are shaped by the need for the school to do well in order to retain its credibility and ensure that its students get places in postsecondary institutions. The effect is to create a pervasive and constant system of evaluation where a single student must effectively pass 160 tests per year, or almost one per day. The deliberate transformation of certain areas of educational process has produced unintended consequences in other aspects,

each of which is justified by practical considerations. The school has a philosophical commitment to weak framing alongside a practical need for strong framing, which reproduces the tension between the innovative philosophy of the school and its need to maintain credibility in the wider educational system.

Although this can be explained away on a purely pragmatic, commonsense level, I believe there is a more substantial influence on the pedagogic frames at Success Secondary. It appears as if weakening one factor—such as pacing—leads inevitably to the strengthening of another—such as content. It is as if the grammar of schooling can accommodate a certain degree of change in syntax when weakened frames in one area are balanced by strengthened frames in another. The focus on the frames to be changed can easily obscure the consequences for other frame factors, and unintended consequences may effectively negate the intended changes. In Success Secondary, for example, the rigidity of the content and the need to get most students through the school in about five years results in dictating the pace of learning: the timetable, an explicit feature of conventional schools, has been replaced by an implicit norm. In effect this reduces the benefit of substantial reform to an option to change the order of learning for individual students, a surprisingly minor benefit for such a complex series of changes.

We can examine the effects of changes more deeply by considering what the aim of the school's founders really was. In interviews they mentioned several times their desire to create a school for everyone (a phrase derived from Trump, 1977), but also acknowledged that Success Secondary would probably not be a neighborhood school. It was always intended to be a school of choice: open to local students, but designed to attract students from all over the district. Labaree (1997) suggests there are three purposes for educational reform: democratic equality, social mobility, and social efficiency. Success Secondary has chosen the third option by choosing to "make schools a mechanism for adapting students to the requirements of a hierarchical social structure and the demands of the occupational marketplace" (p. 46). The team behind the school did not set out to change the world; they just wanted to find a way to offer every student a chance to do better in life. Although such a goal is worthy, it leaves many complex issues unaddressed. Students do not begin on a level playing field with equal talents, and this is largely due to social rather than individual characteristics. More effective adaptation to existing occupational hierarchies does not require Success Secondary to address the effects of social class and other contextual factors—or indeed even examine them. But to ignore the social is to give inequity a free rein in the name of individualism and to obscure the collective nature of schooling.

Maintaining the Culture of the Middle Class

One way to understand schooling as a collective process is to consider knowledge in educational settings as a manifestation of capital. Bourdieu (1997) suggests that education is a means of transmitting desirable forms of this knowledge—capital—and identifies cultural capital, which allows individuals to achieve their ends through means appropriate to the setting as one of the most important. An example of cultural capital is the ability to comprehend and produce academic texts. Cultural capital is not evenly or arbitrarily distributed throughout the population, but follows the structures of social class,

and some types are more valuable than others. In general, middle-class students not only bring cultural capital to the school in a more desirable form, but also find the school an appropriate way to consolidate and extend that capital. Conventional schools reproduce the cultural capital of the middle class (Bourdieu, 1976) such as balancing conventionality and obedience with flexibility and self-management. Other social groups are less comfortable in schools, because they enter with forms of cultural capital that are not valued in the educational system and that are less easily increased in that context. In effect, non-middle-class students have to buy into the middle-class capital model to be successful in school. It should be noted that although this discussion focuses on class, there are many other dimensions to cultural capital, including sexual orientation, sex, ethnicity, and family structure.

Success Secondary certainly challenges the traditional picture of what a school that reproduces middle-class values should look like, but its pedagogy performs the same task. There is a complex pattern of expectations for students to navigate, and one of the few reference points is the magnetic north of behavioral expectations rooted in personality. One useful example of flexibility and self-management is the limited control students can exercise over the instructional discourse. Some exercises of autonomy—such as negotiation over the demonstration of outcomes—are valued and encouraged, whereas others—such as choosing to progress at a slow but steady rate—are disallowed. The balance of weakened and strengthened frames around the curriculum defines the successful student as one who can work to achieve ends, negotiating process and establishing contractual relationships with students and family members along the way.

As mentioned above, Bernstein (1975) suggests that the weakened framing of invisible pedagogy is possible only if there is a shared philosophy. In the case of Success Secondary, weakened framing around order and pace is predicated on a shared philosophy of the mature, motivated, and self-managing individual as the ideal worker for the putative “21st century workplace.” The cultural capital the school transmits to students through these values is the form assumed to be necessary to function in the workplace of the future. Ryan (1995) sees outcome-based education as a way of making schools more similar to the information age workplace, a notion that is central to the reformers at Success Secondary. Students learn identity along with academics as much as at any school, but in this case the weakly framed, individualized identity of the knowledge-age entrepreneur replaces the well-disciplined office worker. Knowledge workers must be able to self-manage to a large extent and demonstrate motivation and maturity. Success Secondary prepares students for the universal and global middle class, where white-collar workers run an economy based on the manipulation of information.

However, conceptualizing these attributes as individual personality traits does not diminish the importance of social context in their development or the fact that the school system that rewards these traits is fundamentally social in character. The tendency for progressive ideals to result in privileging a strongly individualistic set of traits is not unique to this school, and in an extensive study of Canadian outcome-based education Ryan (1995) concludes that “the more open the learning situation, the more the quality of learning depends on

the student's volition" (p. 202). The school's approach to education, beginning with the premise that students need to be treated more individually and ending in a system that recognizes little beyond the personality of the student, is internally consistent, but fails to address and recognize the importance of the context in which education works. Students from middle-class backgrounds are more likely to be successful, as they have learned these behaviors before entering the school and have an ongoing support system while they attend school. The individualized discourse at Success Secondary mainly serves to obscure the collective nature and implications of the educational process and its derivation from middle-class values.

Success Secondary is a school students (and their families) choose to attend, or to leave if it does not work out. The necessity to choose to come to Success has been a crucial element in the school's establishment and existence. The selection of middle-class students to learn middle-class occupational values is less troubling when there are other schools just down the road working on a neighborhood-based, traditional high school model. Although the goal of schools remains university entry, the grammar of schooling remains unassailable, protected by the self-balancing frames of pedagogy.

Conclusion and Implications

In a traditional high school a diverse selection of students works in a clearly delimited educational system. At Success the situation is reversed, with the limits moving from what happens in the school to who attends the school. Success serves the needs of a particular type of student, although this effect is not obvious because the emphasis on individuals obscures the social consequences of the pedagogic system. The reforms leave the central value of the grammar of schooling—the privilege of middle-class culture—undisturbed.

Having looked at Success Secondary through the lens of Bernstein's (1975, 1996) frame theory and considered the patterns of cultural capital at the school, it is possible to understand the effects of the pedagogic reform more deeply. The founders of the school wished to create a school for everybody, where all could learn to their best potential, and their approach was to do away with some of the most sacred cows of school administrators such as scheduling periods and self-contained classrooms. They believed—and continue to believe—that this reform would allow the school to serve two distinct interest groups more effectively. On one hand, the Canadian economy would be better supplied with the imaginative, flexible knowledge workers needed for the new economy. On the other, students previously marginalized by the school system could learn in a self-directed and more successful way. In many ways they believed Success would square the circle by serving progressive ideals of individualized learning and instrumental values of vocational preparation. In my discussion I show that things were not so simple in application.

One of the strongest influences on current practices at the school is the cumulative unintended consequences of the reforms. Weakening one frame meant that others had to be strengthened just to make the school work in the wider educational system. Although the impetus for action was philosophical, the motivation for reaction is entirely pragmatic. Weakened frames throw up common sense problems with apparent common sense solutions, each of which erodes the effect of the reform and helps to restore the overall pedagogic

balance between freedom and control. It seems to me that as long as the school accepts external judgments, whether couched in terms of provincial exam results or media attention, this balance will reassert itself. By choosing to follow the path of social efficiency in their reform, the founders of the school committed themselves to transmitting a certain form of cultural capital, and tinkering with pedagogic frames will be essentially compromised by the need to ensure the efficacy of this transmission. In the end the unintended consequences all but neutralize the intended reform. Success Secondary comes much closer to preserving the grammar of schooling—albeit in a new package—than it does to reforming it.

Tyack and Cuban (1995) would find these results unsurprising. As they argue, “one reason that changing the grammar is difficult is that reforms in one classroom or mini-school or school or district take place within a larger interdependent system” (p. 109). Two of Tyack and Cuban’s strongest recommendations for school reform that can transform the grammar of schooling are that it should be grounded in the experience and desires of teachers, and that it should increase opportunities for students to encounter teachers who will support and inspire them. Success Secondary has chosen a far different course. The design of the school was driven by administrators inspired by academics, albeit with the support of a group of committed classroom teachers. Most of these teachers have stayed with the school, but the new teachers we interviewed were less certain of their long-term involvement. For them the Success system was an imposition rather than an invention of their own making, which raises questions about the future of the school as the original teachers retire or move on. In addition, the form of self-pacing at Success actually reduces the opportunities for students to encounter inspirational teachers, with the possible exception of TA groups. In everyday contexts such as grade 11 English the teacher is merely supporting the primary means of instruction: written learning guides. Following Tyack and Cuban, my analysis of Success suggests that the reform of the school was too ambitious to be viable in the contemporary system of schooling, and the compromises made in the name of viability have eroded the most desirable aspects of the model. It is no longer a school where every student can be successful.

This case study contains two lessons for school reformers. The first is that the wider educational system sets strong limits around what can be reformed. Altering the daily process of education is of little effect when the need to reproduce middle-class cultural forms is so pervasive as a measure of success. The second lesson is that manipulating one pedagogical factor, in this case the timetable, will have unforeseen effects on other factors. Frame factors must be regarded holistically, with the consequences of each change anticipated for every factor. If this had been done for Success, I believe somebody would have asked how deep the changes would really be. It might have been anticipated that the school would select students to fit its innovations when it became clear that not all students were successful in the school. The school is only possible because the notion of choice was so strongly embraced by the district. Overall, this case study shows that creating an inclusive educational system requires a great deal more than a declaration that there shall be no more classes.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Jane Gaskell of UBC for her support in the creation of this analysis. The research project in which it was conducted was partly funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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