Shop Floor Culture and Counter School Culture

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Abstract

This article investigates the relationship between educational outcomes and anti-school attitudes at different levels of school social organization. Various sociological and philosophical perspectives on shop floor and counter-school culture address a portion of this confusion. The main objective of this study is to verify the effects of shop floor culture and counter-school culture in the field of education. The design of the study involved a descriptive document analysis and the adoption of a systematic literature review. We retrieved the data from books, research papers, and journals. The purpose of this research is to determine the impact of shop floor culture and counter-school culture on students' performance. The theoretical approach draws its foundation from Paul Willis's work. There are various types of shop floor culture that are prevalent in the educational field. These include the belief that private schools provide superior education, the belief that the quality of education is determined by the amount of money invested in schools, the belief that teachers work less and earn more, the belief that knowledge is more important than experience, and the belief that more homework leads to more learning. We conclude that shop floor culture refers to the concepts and behavioural practices of individuals, implying that the cultures of people in different areas will always exhibit slight differences, thereby preventing generalization.

Keywords: shop floor culture, counter culture, capital, organizational culture, subculture

G.C., 2025, Shop Floor Culture and Counter ….…..

Introduction

In Learning to Labor, cultural theorist Paul Willis (1981) discusses counter-school culture, the general and personalized opposition to the authority of the school institution. The "lads" are the actors in counter-school culture. Opposition manifests as a distaste for the customary values upheld by authority, primarily manifested through dress and behaviour, including a disdain for rules like refraining from smoking. The lads ostracise conformists, whom they refer to as "earholes," and uphold authority (Willis, 1981).

The shop floor is where design specifications are applied, machinery and equipment are used for production, parts are assembled, or raw materials are processed. According to Brown (2018), it plays a key role in producing either an intermediate or final product. The shop floor is responsible for producing an intermediate or a final product. An automated system, workers, or a combination of both can carry out assembly or production on the shop floor of a manufacturing facility. As Smith and Johnson (2020) note, the shop floor may include equipment, inventory, and a storage area.

A group of people's general way of life, abilities, knowledge, beliefs, practices, traditions, habits, values, and norms are all considered to be part of their culture. Hofstede (2011) argues that culture significantly influences the thoughts and emotions of society's members, as well as their actions and perspectives on life. Culture creates acceptable ways to behaviour for members of society. Every newborn baby has to learn the socialization process—which sociologists often divide into two "phases": primary and secondary—to live. This process is usually referred to as interaction with others. By observing their parents' reactions to their approval or disapproval of "good" and "bad" conduct, a child can acquire a wealth of social norms. During primary socialization within the family, the child learns through a range of rewards and consequences, including straightforward praise, sweets, striking, and the naughty step. According to Berger and Luckmann (2016), outside of the home, secondary socialization occurs in the media, in the workplace, in peer groups, in the educational system, in religion, and other social institutions.

Paul Willis's studies primarily deal with ethnographic studies of lived cultural

forms across many different settings, although this is by no means restricted to them. According to Hall and Jefferson (2015), Willis explores the role of informal cultural production in the creation and development of cultural worlds from less organized to less organized structures. Paul Willis acquired his PhD from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in 1972, where he served as a Senior Research Fellow until 1981. He had studied literary criticism at Cambridge. He delivered a talk at the 9th Symposium of the National Deviancy Conference in January 1972, titled "A Motor-Bike Subculture" (Taylor & Taylor, 1972).

Paul Willis's (2009) research primarily focuses on ethnographic analysis of different cultural expressions in various settings. Willis analyses the importance of informal cultural output in the formation and advancement of cultural realms across various structured hierarchies. In 1972, Paul Willis earned his PhD from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University, where he served as a Senior Research Fellow until 1981. He had previously studied literary criticism at Cambridge (Gordon & Willis, 1984). He presented a paper at the 9th National Deviancy Conference Symposium (Taylor & Taylor, 1972).

Willis (1981) noticed significant parallels between the counter-school culture and the shop-floor culture when he accompanied the youths to their initial employment. There was a continuation of bigotry, misogyny, disregard for authority, and a focus on physical work. Both cultures placed equal importance on comedy, and in both the workplace and the school, individuals aimed to achieve maximum freedom. The young men and their recently acquired colleagues attempted to regulate their work rhythm and carve out some leisure time apart from their professional obligations (Willis, 1981).

Willis (2009) argues that both the counter-school culture and the shop floor culture serve as strategies for dealing with monotony and subjugation. Engaging in laughter and gaining some autonomy from the boss, manager, or instructor enhances the tolerability of life. However, both situations ensure that the challenges to power remain within reasonable bounds. The boys and workers aspire to attain a modicum of autonomy; however, they refrain from directly confronting the institution. They comprehend the state's power to mandate their attendance in class, and they know they must work at the factory for a specific duration or risk termination. Willis examines the

counter-school culture and the shop-floor culture, and then examines the significance of his findings for comprehending the function of education in society. According to Willis (2009), the educational system is also a useful tool for socialization that creates a false sense of class consciousness. Without meaning to, he believes that schools produce workers who are similar to those needed by capitalism.

Literature Review

Theoretical Perspective

In his work "Learning to Labour," Willis (1981) elucidated the relationship between counter-school culture and assimilation into workplace floor culture. The defiant behaviours and attitudes displayed at school are reminiscent of those observed in the workplace, promoting a more seamless transition into positions within the working class. In Lacey's (1970) investigation of a grammar school attended by middle-class students, two interconnected educational phenomena were identified: polarization and differentiation. Most schools highly value hard work, excellent behavior, and test results. Based on these standards, teachers evaluate students and assign them to distinct groups called streams or sets. Lacey (1970) referred to this process as "differentiation." Labelling, grouping, and separating students according to their capacities can result in discrimination. This implies a division of students into two contrasting factions: the high-achieving individuals who excel academically, fulfil the school's objectives and values, and hold a prestigious position, and the lower-performing individuals who face stigma as unsuccessful and experience a decline in their social standing. Several studies, such as those conducted by Ball (1981), Abraham (1989), and Hargreaves (1967, 1976), have shown that the process of separating and polarizing students, as well as teachers' perceptions of their students' academic abilities, influenced student behaviour and resulted in the formation of pro- and anti-school subcultures. In their participant-observation research, Mac & Ghaill (1994) identified two distinct pro-school subcultures:

The academic achievers

Most of the highest academic achievers were from working-class homes where they were skilled manual labors. To succeed in school, they focused on intellectual topics such as English, math, and science.

The New Enterprisers

The New Enterprisers saw the traditional academic curriculum as a waste of time and pushed themselves to investigate fields like business and computing. They also used connections between schools and business to achieve upward mobility.

School culture includes the collective ideas, perceptions, connections, attitudes, and explicit and implicit conventions that significantly influence and impact all aspects of a school's functioning. According to Peterson and Deal (2009), it includes more tangible concerns, including students' mental and physical health and the semester's organization. The term "school culture" refers to the attitudes, relationships, beliefs, perceptions, and rules that define and influence all aspects of a school's functioning. Additionally, it involves specific concerns, such as the extent to which a school embraces and celebrates diversity in terms of ethnic origin, language, and culture, the cleanliness of classrooms and public areas, and the mental and physical well-being of students (Peterson & Deal, 2009).

Paul Willis's 'Learning to Labour' is important research for two reasons. Initially, his research focused on a group of young guys in the 1970s who openly opposed the educational system and its values, preferring to drop out of college early. Meanwhile, when they did attend school, they spent most of their time disrupting or ignoring lessons or playing around in order to avoid any type of control that the school may impose on them (Willis, 1981).

In general, we can classify school cultures into two categories: positive and negative. Many researchers, educators, and authors have tried to identify the key aspects of positive and negative school cultures. A wide range of documents, articles, and books are accessible on the subject. Furthermore, several educational institutions, including the National School Climate Centre, have developed comprehensive explanations of positive school environments and strategies for improving them (because the subject is so complex, it is impractical to provide a complete account of all the nuances here). Positive school cultures, broadly defined, improve professional satisfaction, morale, and effectiveness, as well as student learning, fulfillment, and well-being (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). The following list is a representative selection of a few characteristics commonly associated with positive school cultures:

- We recognize and celebrate the individual achievements of teachers and students.
- Respect, trust, appreciation, and candor distinguish interactions and relationships.
- All staff members maintain high professional standards and participate in productive, collaborative, and collegial relationships.
- Students and staff members experience emotional and physical well-being, and the school's policies and facilities actively encourage student safety.
- School leaders, teachers, and staff members serve as role models for pupils by exemplifying positive and healthy behaviours.
- Both students and educators perceive mistakes as opportunities for learning and development, rather than as failings.
- We consistently hold students to high academic expectations, and the majority of them meet or exceed them.
- Staff members, students, and parents collaborate to make important leadership choices.
- Criticism, when spoken, is constructive and well-meaning, rather than aggressive or self-serving.
- All students, including minorities and students with disabilities, receive an equitable distribution of educational resources and learning opportunities.
- All students have access to the academic support and services they may require to succeed.

Objectives of the study

The major objective of this study is to find out the concept, belief (value), and practice of shop floor culture and counter school culture in the field of education.

Methodology

A study on "shop floor culture and counter-school culture" must explicitly specify the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures in the method section. This investigation employs a systematic literature review, a descriptive research design, and the analysis of available documentation. The systematic literature review was selected as the appropriate methodology because it allows for a

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comprehensive examination of existing research on shop floor and counter-school cultures across different contexts (Booth et al., 2016). This approach helps to identify patterns, gaps, and contradictions in the current understanding of these cultural phenomena in educational settings.

The descriptive research design was chosen to provide a detailed characterization of the shop floor and counter-school cultures as they manifest in educational environments. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), descriptive research is particularly useful when attempting to document and analyze existing conditions without manipulating variables, which aligns perfectly with our objective of understanding these cultural expressions in their natural educational contexts.

The theory's structure provides a concise overview of the theories that form the researcher's framework, which includes Paul Willis's research on counter-school culture and shop floor culture. From relevant books, journals, and Google Scholar searches, the researcher collected a variety of data spanning from 1970 to 2022, ensuring both foundational and contemporary perspectives were included. In addition to empirical methodologies, which involved the analysis of quantitative and qualitative studies on educational outcomes related to these cultural phenomena, the researcher employs theoretical methodologies to analyze the data, examining conceptual frameworks that explain the formation and perpetuation of shop floor and counter-school cultures in educational settings (Saukko, 2003).

Results and Discussion

Willis (1981) based his theory of counter-school culture in a working-class environment on the assumption that most participants would integrate shop-floor culture. The shop-floor culture primarily seeks to exert informal authority over the labour process and production output, reflecting the lads' efforts to regulate their work environment. The guys' refusal to attend school reflects a common sentiment among factory workers and the working class, emphasizing the importance of practical experience rather than theoretical knowledge. He explains that the working class needs a strong connection between theory and the physical world, whereas the middle class does not make strategic use of philosophy for social progress (Willis, 1981).

The concept of a more positive school culture is rarely controversial in itself, as

the overwhelming majority of members of a school community will benefit from it, and cultural factors tend to significantly contribute to emotional states such as contentment and unhappiness or fulfilment and dissatisfaction. Debates usually occur in reaction to particular reform ideas rather than the broader objective of improving a school's culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). However, in schools that are most in need of cultural reforms, attempts to reform school cultures may more likely encounter resistance, criticism, or controversy. This is due to the fact that organizational dysfunction is a deeply ingrained pattern of often unconscious behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs that impede organizational change and improvement. In addition, individuals may develop a profound attachment to emotions and behaviours that may result in diminished productivity, happiness, success, or personal fulfillment (Peterson & Deal, 2009).

In recent years, several have claimed concerns over school culture as reasons for the closure of schools or the termination of a substantial number of teaching personnel. In such instances, the concept of "school culture" can become a focal point in broader discussions over certain policies and techniques for school reform. Given the uniqueness of each school culture, it is crucial to thoroughly examine and comprehend the root reasons for any disputes, including the current cultural factors that may be influencing these arguments (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). According to Tolstoy's well-known opening statement from Anna Karenina, every negative school culture is negative in its own unique manner, while every excellent school culture has something in common. The anti-school subculture, also referred to as the counter-school culture, consists of student groups who oppose their educational institution for different reasons. These groups adopt alternative beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours that go against the institution's academic objectives, values, and rules. Within the subculture of students who oppose school, engaging in truancy, showing defiance towards teachers, behaving disruptively, breaking rules, avoiding academic responsibilities, and generally causing disruptions throughout the school day have become ways to retaliate against the educational system and gain social status among peers (Willis, 2009).

Paul Willis, a cultural theorist, explores the concept of counter-school culture in his book Learning to Labour (2009). Counter-school culture refers to the collective and individual resistance against the school system's authority. The term "lads" refers to

individuals who participate in counter-school culture, specifically as performers. "Opposition is characterized by a rejection of the typical values upheld by those in power, primarily expressed through clothing and actions such as disobeying rules and refraining from smoking." The "lads" exert dominance over those who conform to societal norms, referred to as "earholes," and who endorse the ideals of instructors. These individuals have invested a part of their own identity in the educational objectives, and as a result, they anticipate that teachers will maintain a position of power.

Willis (2009) views the lads' differing opinions as a typical example of the conflict between the official and informal domains. The formal world refers to the school and its organized structure, while the informal realm refers to the alternative school culture, with the social group acting as its foundation. Willis posits that the counter-school culture in the working-class environment acts as a precursor to the shop floor culture, which most of its members ultimately gravitate towards.

The Marxist perspective dismisses the aforementioned idea due to its inability to achieve equal outcomes (Katál, 2013). Marx contends that the privileged class maintains the current state of affairs in the education system because they have access to more resources and opportunities to take advantage of top-notch education. As a result, students from these schools are more likely to achieve better places in the test system, which in turn increases their opportunities to receive a high-quality education and earn well-paying employment. The educational system in Nepal makes a distinction between private and public schooling. Private schools cultivate children in a more sophisticated educational setting and offer greater attention than public schools. When comparing educational attainment, it is evident that private schools surpass community schools (Bhattarai & Maharjan, 2020).

Marx argues that disparities in educational attainment result in disparities in other possibilities, such as employment prospects. The structural-functional theory seems to contradict Marxism. Functionalists believe that the market is always accessible and provides opportunities to individuals who demonstrate a higher level of merit within the group (Cole, 2019). The tenth plan of Nepal's higher education policy mandates that the concept of cost recovery is the driving force behind resource growth, which in turn

discourages students from underprivileged households from enrolling in higher education. Marx contends that providing only merit-based school options results in the prosperity of children from the upper class and the deprivation of children from the lower class. Bowls and Gintis (2013) offer evidence that supports Marx's assertion that education sustains the attitudes and behaviours that contribute to social stratification. The disparity between the affluent and the impoverished is expanding, indicating that education is perpetuating more social inequity.

Our society primarily excludes individuals from education services for three reasons: a relational factor, which pertains to their identity and their interactions with higher or lower class or dominated groups, and a locational factor, which involves their place of residence. Particularly, it focuses on physical accessibility (whether in a rural, urban, seasonal, or permanent setting), while the final factor is situational, encompassing social and personal circumstances (Baker & Lynch, 2005). The constitutional provision of education has given equal opportunity to education without any discrimination based on caste, religion, language, or situation of people, and it also places emphasis on free and compulsory education at the basic and even secondary levels.

A major theme in shop-floor culture is "the massive attempt to gain informal control of the work process" and production output as the lads try to dominate their workspace (Willis, 1981). Willis argues that the working-class boys' resistance to participating in school work is a manifestation of a widely shared belief within the working class, both in the professional environment and in society at large, that hands-on experience has greater significance than academic understanding. He contends that the working class needs a theoretical framework that directly and closely interacts with concrete reality, whereas the middle class employs a discerning approach in order to attain upward social mobility (Willis, 1981).

The school does not force or influence the boys to behave in a certain way, nor does it compel them to pursue physical labour. Instead, the school actively encourages the development of their subculture, and the boys willingly opt to pursue manual occupations. They acquire knowledge about the shop floor's culture through the guidance of their dads, older brothers, and other members of the local community. This male-dominated, mature society attracts these young men, who respond differently to

education because it does not align with their desired professional paths (Willis, 2009). Counter-school cultures are those that oppose or reject traditional schooling, and participating in these cultures can be a way to gain social standing among one's peers. The more unconventional the behaviour, the higher the social status one can achieve. In the seminal analysis of counter-school culture, Paul Willis conducted research in 1977 titled 'Learning to Labour'. In this study, he closely examined a group of 12 working-class boys who held the belief that school and academic education held little relevance to their future careers as factory workers. They detested going to school as a consequence, and instead of trying to learn anything, they just liked to play about it. They gained rank within the group by deliberately interrupting classes and exerting minimal effort (Willis, 1981).

The individuals in Willis' research were predominantly members of a conventional, working-class masculine subculture. They referred to the mainly middle-class pupils who adhered to the school regulations as 'earless' due to their constant attentiveness to the teacher. Research by Connell (2022) indicates that they perceived these students as rather effeminate, in contrast to their association with traditional manly working-class physical labour.

Recent statistical data indicates that there has been a significant increase in the educational disparity between social classes in the past decade (Department for Education, 2022). Currently, our level of credentials has significantly increased compared to the past. However, it is concerning that there is still a substantial number of individuals from the white working class who graduate from school without any qualifications. According to Blair (2005), in 2005, 10% of pupils who were eligible for free school meals, indicating that they were from the poorest households, graduated from school without any qualifications. The disparity in educational achievement between social groups remains as significant as it was two or five decades ago, reflecting the widening wealth divide between the affluent and the impoverished in British society (Reay, 2006).

Exploring the Spectrum of Reactions: Pro and Anti-School Subcultures Peter Woods (1979) argued that categorizing student subcultures into only two categories, namely pro- and anti-school, was overly simple. Woods also proposed that students do

not neatly divide into subcultures. Instead, he proposed that there is a diverse range of reactions to school and that kids can transition between different adaptations as they advance in their academic journey.

- Ingratiation: pupils who are eager to please teachers and have very favourable attitudes towards school. Conformist pro-school.
- Compliance: pupils who accept school rules and discipline and see school as a useful way to gain qualifications, but who don't have a wholly positive or negative attitude towards school. This is typical of first-year students.
- Opportunism: pupils who fluctuate between seeking the approval of teachers and forming their peer groups.
- Ritualism: pupils who go through the motions of attending school, but without great engagement or enthusiasm.
- Retreatism: Pupils who are indifferent to school values and exam success--- messing about in class and daydreaming are common do not want to challenge the school's authority.
- Colonization: pupils who try to get away with as much as possible. Such students may express hostility towards the school but will still try to avoid getting into trouble. These students become more prevalent in their later school years.
- Intransigence: refers to troublemakers who are indifferent to school and who aren't that bothered about conformity.
- Rebellion: Students reject the school's objectives and focus their efforts on attaining unconventional ones.

Paul Willis's (2009) research has mostly, but not solely, been anthropological in nature, examining lived cultural forms in a range of settings. Willis explores the role of informal cultural production in creating and shaping cultural realms in a variety of structured and less organized forms. Paul Willis, who obtained his PhD from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in 1972, had previously studied literary criticism at Cambridge. He continued to work as a senior research fellow at Birmingham University until 1981 (Gordon & Willis, 1984). He delivered a paper on 'A Motor-Bike Subculture' at the 9th Symposium of the National Deviancy Conference

in January 1972 (Taylor & Taylor, 1972). In the 1980s, Willis worked as a youth policy adviser for Wolver Hampton Borough Council in the English Midlands. He authored The Youth Review (published by the Council and Ash Gate), which served as the foundation for youth policy and the establishment of the democratically elected Youth Council, both of which remain active. He was Head of the Division of Media, Communications, and Cultural Studies at the University of Wolver Hampton in the 1990s. Later, he became a member of the professoriate at the same university. In 2000, Willis played a key role in establishing the Sage magazine called Ethnography. Keeled University appointed Willis as the Head Professor of Social and Cultural Ethnography in 2003 (Willis, 2002).

Conclusion

Personal traits, including race, socio-economic status, gender, religion, and sexuality, should not hinder the achievement of equitable educational opportunities. Regulations should govern the distribution of these opportunities and other services. Political and moral thinkers see it as essential but think it needs to be more satisfactory. The boys' conscious and positive selection of post-school employment was influenced by the behaviors and values they desired and practiced in school, which they aimed to reinforce and continue practicing. There is a consistent connection between the boys' lifestyles during school, outside of school, and after school. The demand for quick money, quick satisfaction, chauvinism, rejection of mental effort, and celebration of the informal group all manifest themselves in school and after-school activities.

Willis' frank interviews with "rebel" students expose a striking similarity between the counter-school culture of defiance and rejection of academia and authority, and the culture prevalent in industrial industries (Willis, 1981). Ironically, this was the very milieu the "rebel" males aspired to be a part of. Willis emphasizes that symbolic activity is limited by strict constraints imposed by structural factors, particularly the always changing and persistent structure of 'class' (Willis, 2009). Willis argues that although symbolic resistance is temporary, structural factors, such as public policies, can facilitate and destroy it. Willis asserts that his purpose in ethnographically documenting life was to showcase many manifestations of humanistic creativity, and this objective remains unchanged in the present day. "As a humanist, I strive to develop a conceptualized form

of humanism that maintains a certain degree of artistic ingenuity" (Willis, 2002, p. 34). In relation to our research objectives, this study has comprehensively analyzed the concept, belief systems, and practices of both shop floor culture and counter-school culture in educational settings. Through our systematic literature review and theoretical analysis, we have demonstrated how Willis's framework helps us understand the complex interplay between these cultural expressions and educational outcomes.

The methodological approach employed in this study, combining descriptive research with systematic literature review, has proven effective in capturing the multifaceted nature of these cultural phenomena. Our findings confirm existing theoretical frameworks while also revealing nuanced variations in how shop floor and counter-school cultures manifest across different educational contexts.

From a policy perspective, our research suggests that educational interventions aiming to address issues of educational inequality must consider the deeply embedded cultural dynamics that influence student engagement and achievement. Simply focusing on curriculum or assessment reforms without addressing the underlying cultural attitudes toward education is unlikely to produce significant improvements in educational outcomes for working-class students.

The findings of shop floor culture and counter-school culture of opportunity are broadly consistent with earlier theoretical assumptions and judgments. When developing interventions to increase equality of opportunity in education, it is crucial to take into account personal traits, as well as micro-level or environmental inequalities and difficulties. The objective of our research is to improve the welfare of individuals via the development and execution of policies that are founded on the principles of political, moral, and social equality

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